

 NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC

WORLD of WONDER

Smart Family Travel

PAGE 68

TRAVELER

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MARCH-APRIL 2012

CUBA!

The Time Is Now

MORE
TRAVELER
ON THE
APP
STORE

PAGE 30

**28 Movies
That Put
You There**

**America's
Surprise
Comeback
City**

(See page 46)

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2012 EXPLORER





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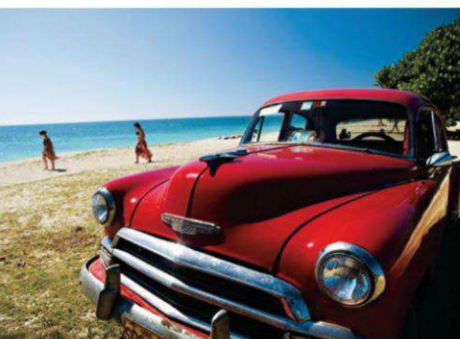
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

46 | Rise and Shine: Detroit's New Spirit

A son of the Motor City returns to find his maligned childhood home revving its engines once more.

Story by ANDREW NELSON

Photographs by MELISSA FARLOW



58 | Falling for Cuba

As travel restrictions ease up for U.S. visitors to this red-hot Caribbean island (*above*), the author seeks the country's pulse on the dance floor.

Story by JAMES VLAHOS

68 | Family Travel: A World of Wonder

School your children outside the classroom—and maybe change their lives in the process—with indelible travel experiences. Evolve in the Galápagos, seek treasure at D.C.'s Library of Congress, and discover the joy of subtle beauty in Kyoto, Japan.

Story by KEITH BELLOWS



On the Cover:

Downtown Havana retains its timeless charm. Story on page 58. Photograph by del Sol Photography.



46
The Detroit Opera House premiered as a theater in 1922, claiming to be the world's fifth largest.



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Visit the Alexia Facebook Page at [Facebook.com/AlexiaFoods](https://www.facebook.com/AlexiaFoods) now through March 2012 to help decide Alexia's next French fry flavor. While you're there, be sure to check out the other great offers and promotions from Alexia.

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SWEET POTATO
Crispy Bite-Sized Puffs

14 **REAL TRAVEL** Opposites attract: The deep, steadfast roots of trees fascinate Daisann McLane, a lifelong wanderer.

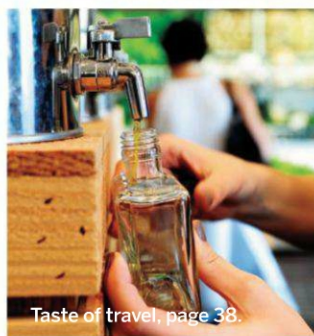
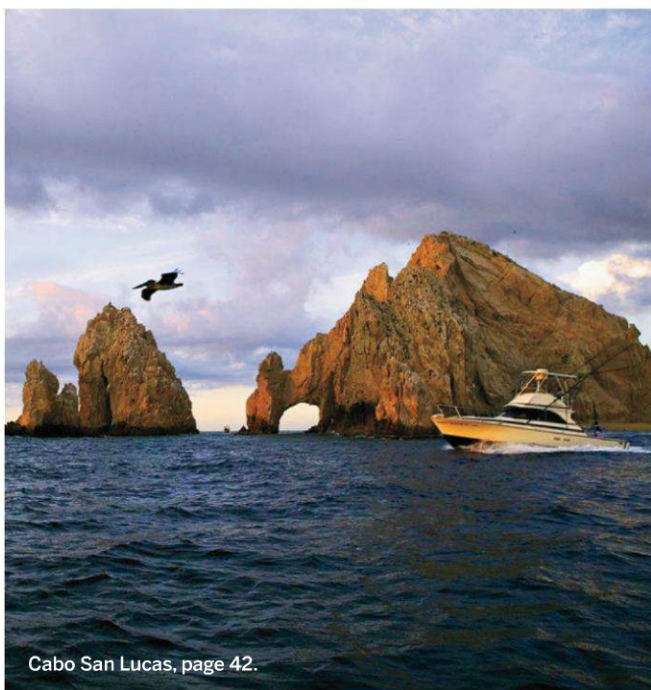
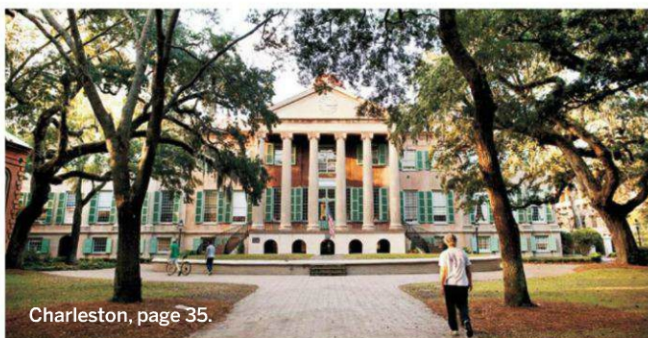
16 **ONE ON ONE** Zita Cobb reinvents a Newfoundland island (*left*) while redefining what it means to be an entrepreneur.

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Whole new world: As borders tighten, more foreigners may have to rely on snapshots to sightsee.

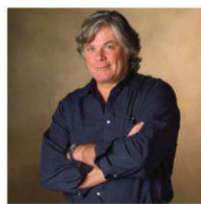
EDITOR'S NOTE

Access Denied

LAST NOVEMBER, at London's World Travel Market—the planet's largest gathering of travel professionals—*Traveler* became the first magazine to win the prestigious World Tourism Award (for “pioneering geotourism,” the brainchild of our geotourism editor, Jonathan Tourtellot).

But it was other news there that really got me thinking. We travelers, it seems, have a new problem: the visa vendetta. While moderating a panel that included 13 ministers of tourism (representing countries ranging from Mexico to South Africa), I discovered one subject that got everyone animated: Visas are becoming harder to get.

This is now a personal hot button. Several weeks prior, I had been scheduled to fly to Beijing, a place I've visited many times, to lead a group of travelers on a jet trip around the world. I had applied for a visa about three months earlier. Weeks passed. I was assured that my visa would arrive any day. Then the Chinese Embassy capriciously denied



my application, giving no reason, even after repeated inquiries. I later learned a likely scenario for why I had been stonewalled. Since 9/11, to obtain a U.S. visa, a prospective visitor is required to give fingerprints—and may wait six months and have to submit to an FBI name check. The tourism ministers confirmed that some countries have retaliated to make visas tougher for travelers to get. For instance, in a direct tit for tat, Saudia Arabia recently announced a prolonged visa waiting period for Canadians. And even though travel restrictions are loosening for Americans to go to Cuba (see “Falling for Cuba,” page 58), huge bureaucratic hurdles remain.

Such tourism jockeying hurts the economy. In a bid for inclusivity, Washington finally created Brand USA, the first-ever national marketing effort to goose travel to our shores. Yet inconsistent and intrusive security checks throw obstacles in the way of folks who just want to see the world. —*Keith Bellows*

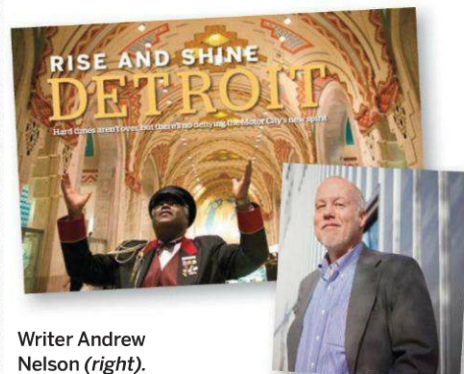
BACKSTORY

Finding Detroit's Esprit de Corps

Writer Andrew Nelson knows all about cities with roller-coaster luck. A New Orleans resident for the past three years, he returned to his childhood hometown to report “Rise and Shine Detroit” (page 46).

While there, Nelson noticed more parallels between the two cities, in addition to their recent hard times. Both places have enviable riverfront locations, strong musical cultures, and deep African-American roots. And, Nelson says, “people forget that Detroit was also founded by the French, whose influence crops up in fascinating ways.”

For instance, some Detroiters refer to the Nain Rouge, aka the Red Dwarf, a



Writer Andrew Nelson (right).

harbinger of disaster said to date to the early 1700s. “He’s this little guy that supposedly shows up whenever bad luck is about to hit Detroit,” Nelson explains. “He was sighted before the riots in 1967 and the huge ice storm of 1976.”

The recently revived Marche du Nain Rouge features a Mardi Gras-style parade intended to banish the evil spirit. The event (held March 25 this year) is also a raucous community party.

Nelson says such parts of Detroit’s “secret history” are now emerging from the long shadow of the auto industry.

“Seeing how alive and dense downtown Detroit is again—and seeing the passion of its people, like the guy I met with a ‘Spirit of Detroit’ tattoo on his arm—gives a native like me a real thrill.”

Our Mission: *National Geographic Traveler* reports on destinations of distinction and character, and we support efforts to keep them that way—believing that to enhance an authentic “sense of place” will benefit both travelers and the locations they visit. For more information, visit travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable.



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Nerves of Steel

IT WAS INEVITABLE: Stamp “Best of the World” on 20 places (November–December 2011), expect to stir some controversy. Emotions ran particularly high about our inclusion of the Steel City. “It takes a lot for a city to impress me, but Pittsburgh did just that,” wrote **Matt Taylor** of Marlboro, Mass. Others weren’t convinced: “Are you kidding me?” e-mailed one reader. The most creative response was a cartoon by Rob Rogers for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that likened shirtless Steelers fans to half-naked Pygmies.



Funny pages: Cartoonist Rob Rogers riffs on our “Best of the World” feature.

“My knee-jerk reaction was that you guys clearly haven’t traveled very much if you think this is one of the best places in the world,” jokes Rogers, a Pennsylvania native who has lived in Pittsburgh for more than 25 years. “But once I read the article, I got it. I love it here, and it’s remarkable to get this kind of recognition.”

Flight Club

In the November–December 2011 issue, we asked readers to share favorite airport amenities from around the world (see this issue’s reader question at right). “Singapore’s Changi has everything a traveler needs—shops, amazing

restaurants, places to sleep for a few hours, oxygen to give you a burst of freshness, and massage chairs,” wrote **Maryann Traynor** of Bedford, U.K.

Singaporean **Manfred Kwek** piled on more praise for Changi. “Directly above the departure hall in terminal 1, the food court serves local favorites like *kaya* toast and wonton noodles.”

“Anyone with young kids can appreciate layovers in Schiphol (Amsterdam),” wrote **Beth Jere** of Lusaka, Zambia. “They have a quiet room with baby cribs and play areas for active toddlers. They also have bottle warmers. A parent’s dream!”

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“When I’m stressed, I imagine myself in Muskoka, Canada, sitting on a lake dock watching the sunset and listening to the loons. Simply magical!”

—Elizabeth Bean Crookston of Toronto on “Best of the World”

Most everyone, it seems, fantasizes about a day when Wi-Fi is a given at all airports. In the meantime, readers look to airport hotspots such as in Helsinki, Finland, and Hong Kong. Our tech-hungry readers also light up when they find an airport with plenty of electrical outlets.

Stateside airports got their share of love for attention to details. “I was surprised that you did not include the \$4 million of art in Indianapolis’s terminals,” wrote **John Toevs** of his city’s airport.

Tina Hulen of Milwaukee, Wis., likes her home airport’s “recombobulation area” and Ping-Pong tables. Other amenities that brighten our readers’ travels range from souvenirs stocked by the gift shops of area museums in Albany, N.Y., to the sitting space with rockers and plants in Charlotte, N.C.

Our kudos go to **Leslie Miller** of Tuscaloosa, Ala., for discovering the quirkiest way to pass a layover. “Nashville’s airport has hired its famous country music stars, such as Lee Ann Womack and George Strait, to record those tedious airport announcements. It really makes me pay attention as I try to identify each voice.”

Rain Check

“Daisann McLane’s Real Travel column about the joys of rain during travel [November–December 2011] brought

back enchanting memories of walking in Florence, Italy, during a week of rain,” wrote **Carol Milardo Floriani** of Easley, S.C.

“The spring drizzle made it seem as if we were walking through a watercolor. Awash in shades of gray, the River Arno, Ponte Vecchio, Duomo, and other sights were breathtaking. Moving in the rain gave familiar sights an emotional dimension.”

A storm also proved meaningful for **Brooke Stoneman** of Casablanca, Morocco, while visiting Rome with her husband. “I am usually a ‘go, see, do’ kind of traveler. On our way to the Pantheon, we got caught in an August rainstorm. We ducked into a large cathedral and ended up staying for Mass—a most memorable experience. The rain allowed me to throw out my list and let Rome just happen to us.”



YOUR TURN

What childhood trip changed your life?

Tell us: We’ll publish some here.

Send an e-mail to Travel_Talk@ngs.org. See page 68 for life-changing experiences for kids and families.

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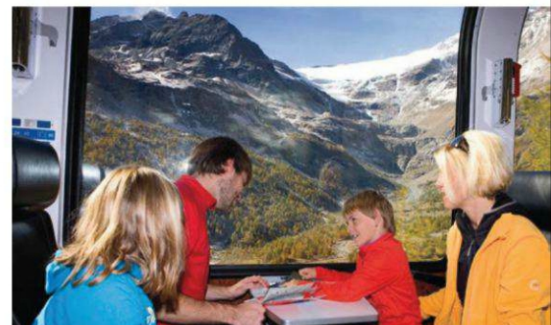
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Swiss Travel System

Switzerland is home to one of the most comprehensive public transport networks in the world—affordable, easy to use, and spectacularly scenic. The highlight of any trip to Switzerland is a journey through unforgettable landscapes on scenic routes.

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Rooting for Trees

The permanence of trees alternately charms and alarms this seasoned traveler

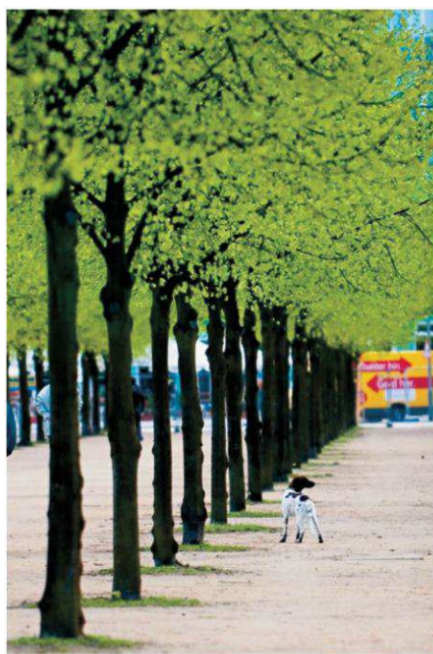
IT WAS ONLY A TREE. I say this line to myself, repeating it twice. No use. I'm still breathing in gulps. My chest aches as if somebody has just stepped on it. Although it's early—only five in the morning—several of my Brooklyn neighbors have gathered with me on our building's front stoop. We huddle together against the wind, wordlessly, staring at... well I'm not really sure what to call it. Wreckage? A corpse? Because it feels as if someone has just collapsed and died right here on our street. All night long, dark hurricane rains

had thrashed and slammed against our windows. The storm eventually passed, but it left behind a whiff of something strange, yet familiar, in the air. When did my city block acquire the aroma of hiking on a summer morning in the deep woods? Then, stepping outside, I get it. Before me are tree roots, suddenly wrenched up from the ground, plus clumps of wet earth, rain-soaked leaves, and freshly splintered wood. My Brooklyn street has turned into instant Vermont. The fragrance is delicious, but I feel guilty for enjoying it. It is, after all, the smell of death.

I should tell you right away that I'm not much of a gardener or botanist, and it's seldom that I can identify flora by name. But I knew the tree that stood outside my building for 40 years was a linden because some years earlier I had traveled to Berlin, Germany, during the early summer and walked from the Brandenburg Gate toward the Tiergarten park along Berlin's famous tree-lined boulevard known as Unter den Linden ("under the lindens"). The endless lindens, frilly with seasonal white blossoms, gave off a sweet and unexpectedly reassuring fragrance. I soon realized why I found the smell comforting: Unter den Linden boulevard has the very same aroma as my street in Brooklyn on mornings in late June.

On such linden-perfumed mornings you will often find me standing outside the door of my building. There will be a suitcase (or two) at my feet and a backpack dangling from my shoulder. I'm not noticing the neighborhood foliage because I'm too busy eyeballing to the end of the block for the car service guy I called to take me to the airport, hoping he hasn't become stuck in traffic.

Once again I am leaving home, turning into a traveler. Travel isn't just a passion for me; it's an identity that has wrapped and tangled its branches and tendrils around me so intricately that I



Green power: Trees line Berlin's Unter den Linden.

**I spend my life
as a traveler
chasing after
the one thing
that a tree
embodies—a
sense of place.**

in Beijing. He had built himself a traditional Chinese-style house, which included a garden courtyard. The courtyard appeared exceptionally spacious because it contained exactly one slender tree.

I was astonished when the sculptor told me that it had taken him ten years—and tens of thousands of dollars—to obtain his garden's centerpiece. The tree was a *huanghuali*, a slow-growing, fragrant rosewood prized for its color and smoothness that is found only in southern China. In order for the tree to take root and survive Beijing's frigid winters, he had chosen to acclimate it gradually by moving it every year a few hundred miles farther north. This *huanghuali* tree wasn't just the centerpiece of an exotic garden; it was an exhausted traveler at the end of a difficult journey.

Opposites, as we know, attract. Because

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

Thurs. 9:41 p.m.

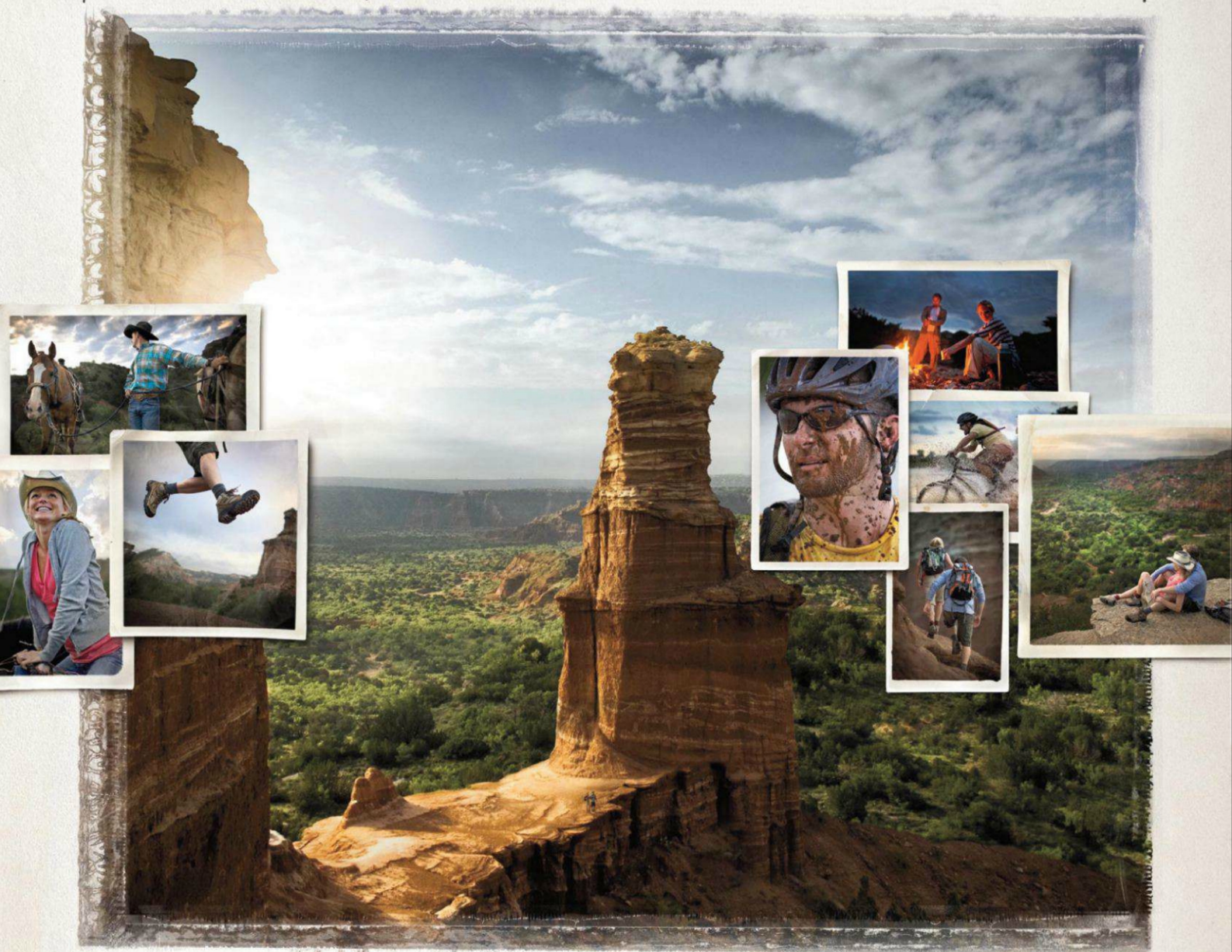
Checked the weather online.

Fri. 6:12 a.m.

Downloaded maps to my GPS.

Sun. 1:05 p.m.

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It's like a whole other country.

For the Love of Cod

A social entrepreneur reinvents an island off Newfoundland through tourism and the arts

ZITA COBB IS BUILDING a future that respects the past. Her Shorefast Foundation, founded in 2006 on Newfoundland's rugged Fogo Island, aims to parlay 400 years of local culture, centered historically on fishing, into a thriving economy bolstered by the arts and tourism. To that end, the foundation is funding the construction of art studios—complete with a residency program for guest artists—and a 29-room inn, set to open this year, where visitors and locals will mingle in common areas. The foundation will also grant micro-loans to help locals start their own businesses on the 92-square-mile island. Cobb, who made her fortune in the high-tech industry, is at the vanguard of a culturally responsible form of entrepreneurship.

What defines the next-generation entrepreneur? He

or she serves the needs of culture and the environment and not just business. To my mind, it's a kind of social entrepreneurship, having the very best tools from the traditional, for-profit business world but serving the right ends.

What are you trying to create on Fogo Island? I'm very concerned for Fogo and many other places suffering a flattening of culture, the loss of a sense of self. It happens when you're ripped away from home, from the natural world, and from your ancestors: people from Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, working out

ZITA COBB

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Using some \$10 million of her own money, Zita Cobb, a former corporate executive, founded the Shorefast Foundation to help make Newfoundland's Fogo Island, population 2,700, a destination for arts and culture. Cobb, 53, grew up on the island in the 1960s. She has also done philanthropic work in Africa.

west as economic refugees in Alberta. As this happens, a little bit of us dies. I hope to help us remain shorefast on our rock. A shorefast is a tether that joins a cod trap to the shore and a metaphor for communities realizing the importance of holding on to physical place and tradition.

A common view of Newfoundland is that of a fishing culture dying out. True. Many communities have not survived. People just moved away. But we are still the "people of the cod."

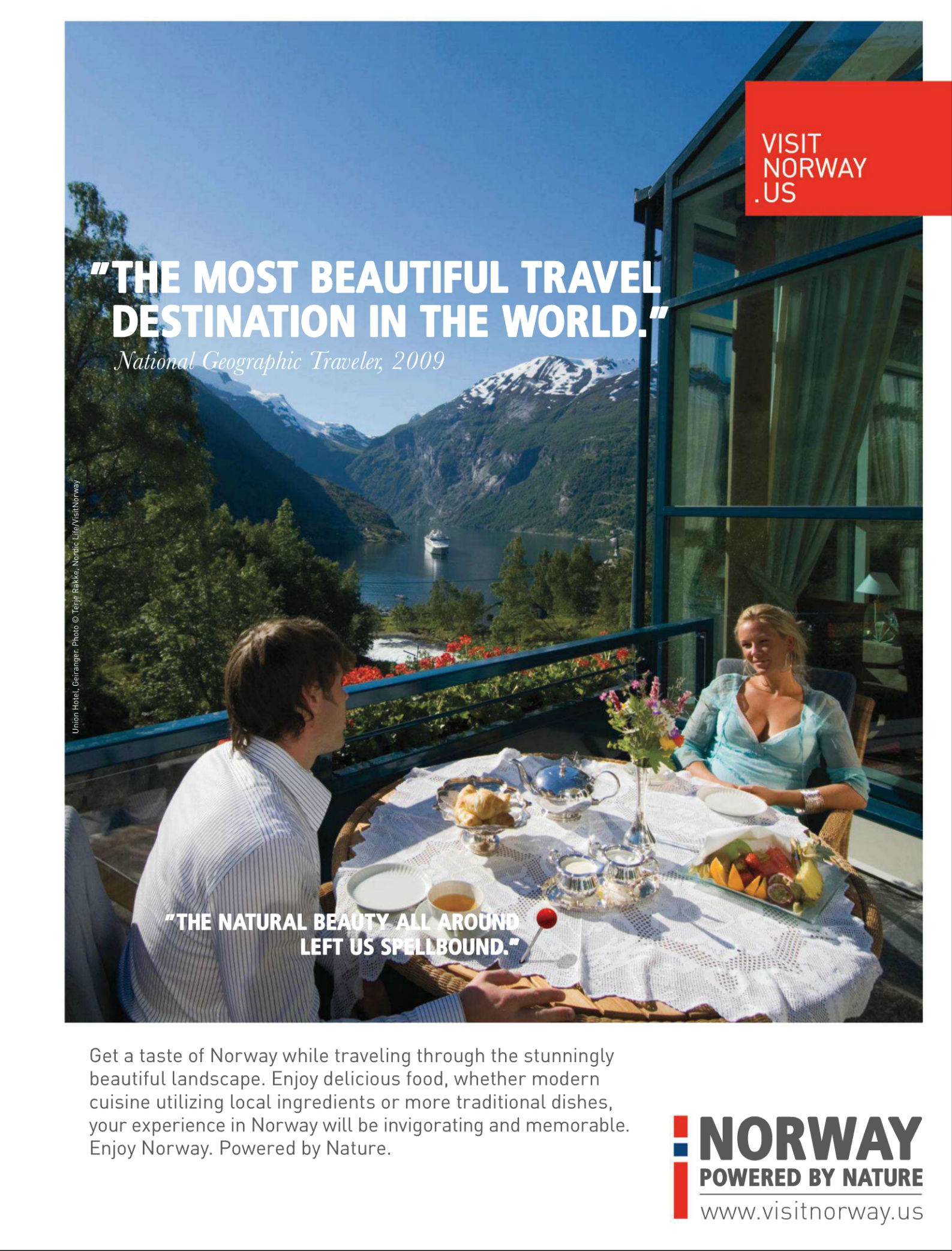
Even though there's been a moratorium since 1992, cod fishing is a driver in our culture. And there's evidence the cod are coming back. Fogo Island has been lucky. It faced the threat of resettlement in the 1960s, when hundreds of Newfoundland communities had no roads, electricity, or health care. Fogo's ten culturally distinct communities hardly com-

municated with each other. Growing up in Joe Batt's Arm, I didn't know anybody from Deep Bay. So we couldn't strategize together about the future. Then the National Film Board of Canada arrived. Filmmaker Colin Low made 27 films, giving editorial control to the communities. This brought people together, and they founded the Fogo Island Co-op, owned by fishermen and plant workers. The co-op operates the fish plants on the island. Fishing boats go out every day, and that's why we haven't lost our culture. That's an example of how art spawned social change and innovation. CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



Fish out of water: Zita Cobb on Fogo Island, in front of her foundation's first artist studio.

GORDON SLADE



VISIT
NORWAY
.US

"THE MOST BEAUTIFUL TRAVEL DESTINATION IN THE WORLD."

National Geographic Traveler, 2009

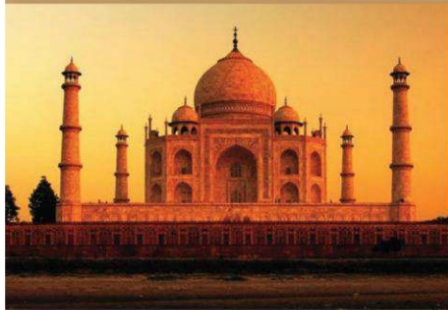
Union Hotel, Geiranger. Photo © Terje Røkke, Nordic Life/VisitNorway

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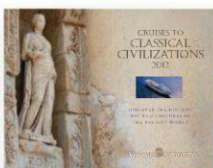


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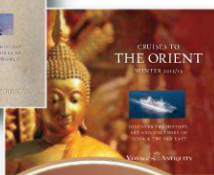
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Or contact your travel professional

Tell us about the Fogo Island Inn. It's owned by the community. It's not a resort. It's part public, part private. Inside will be a heritage library, an art gallery, and a cinema. If you walk into the inn and see only other visitors, we will have failed. It's supposed to be a place where visitors and locals come together.

And the artist residency program? The intention is to bring international artists to Fogo. The presence of outside artists fosters locals' self-confidence about their own art. When the visiting artists leave, they become ambassadors for Fogo Island.

Canada used to turn its back on Newfoundland. Does it still? Newfoundlanders seem foreign to other Canadians partly because we came to the nation late and partly because we're cast out on that rock by ourselves, and that rock is a very strange physical place, like a stone planet. Imagine, centuries ago people came from England and Ireland to eke out a living on the North Atlantic and were formed by those rocks and by that encounter with the sea. There isn't any place else like it. One thing that tainted our early experience was that Newfoundland's first premier, Joey Smallwood, was all about industrialization. "Give up

this ridiculous fishing," he would say, in effect. "Everybody's got to move to Gander or Grand Falls and work in the pulp mill." That was his dream. As a result, the fishery was never respected. In recent years, the economy has improved, changing us from a have-not to a "have" province, somewhat. Our wild fisheries are earning more respect as we become better stewards. And some of the mills have closed, so Joey's dream has not quite worked out.

What has been the biggest frustration? It's when I hear people say: "Why would anyone go to Fogo Island?" Many young Newfoundlanders have been to Disneyland but have never seen a fishing boat. I'm also terrified that as we try to hang on to our traditional views, the fast-food chains will set up house. The question is, can we partner with the local government to prevent having our culture flattened? If people want McDonald's, Subway, Burger King, and Tim Hortons, they have every right to them, but we have to help them understand what lies down the road. By the time we figure out that we've invited the beast into the living room, it's too late. ■

KEITH BELLOWS is the editor in chief.

REAL TRAVEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

my spirit feeds on perpetual motion, my heart opens wide for these living things that stand tall and grounded for decades, becoming more embedded year by year in their cities and countries, their native soil.

The truth is, landscapes without trees unnerve me a little, and I find that I avoid them. I prefer to linger under the glossy, dark green canopies of mango trees in southern India and wander down streets in Hong Kong where Asian ficus trees claw and gnarl their way out of stone and into the sky, deploying their roots across vertical walls. I light incense, or bow, or make a wish to the spirit trees of every culture, from Caribbean banyans tied with bright red sashes for African gods to Japanese maples aflutter with wish-bearing pieces of paper, to small-town American oaks ablaze with yellow ribbons demonstrating support for a faraway soldier. The irony doesn't escape me: I spend my life as a traveler constantly chasing after the one thing that a tree effortlessly embodies—a sense of place.

There is a wonderful old Cuban song that inevitably brings tears to my eyes even though it's corny. It's sung from the point

of view of a male tree. The tree falls deeply in love with a little girl who has carved her name playfully onto the bark of his trunk one day. As a token of his affection for her, he drops one of his flowers at her feet. In time, the little girl grows up, leaving behind her childhood—and the besotted tree. But trees are stationary, of course, and can't move on. He can't follow her. Therefore his love, like his roots enmeshed in Cuban soil—and the initials the girl engraved on his heart—is permanent.

Of course, it's not. Nothing is. Even the most solid and grounded of trees can be knocked down in just seconds by an unexpected hurricane. And even the most committed traveler sometimes turns into a tree. Standing on my stoop the morning following the big Brooklyn storm, I say goodbye to the fallen linden tree that I've parted from so many times before. This goodbye feels different, though. The smell of earth fills the air and roots are encircling my ankles, spreading into the ground, and holding a restless wanderer, at least for this moment, in place. ■

Contributing editor DAISANN McLANE tweets from her travels. You can follow her on Twitter: @Daisann_McLane.

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MONTANA

SHAPED BY NATURE.

Yellowstone River, Montana

AN INTERVIEW WITH MONTANA FLY FISHING GUIDE JENNY GROSSENBACHER

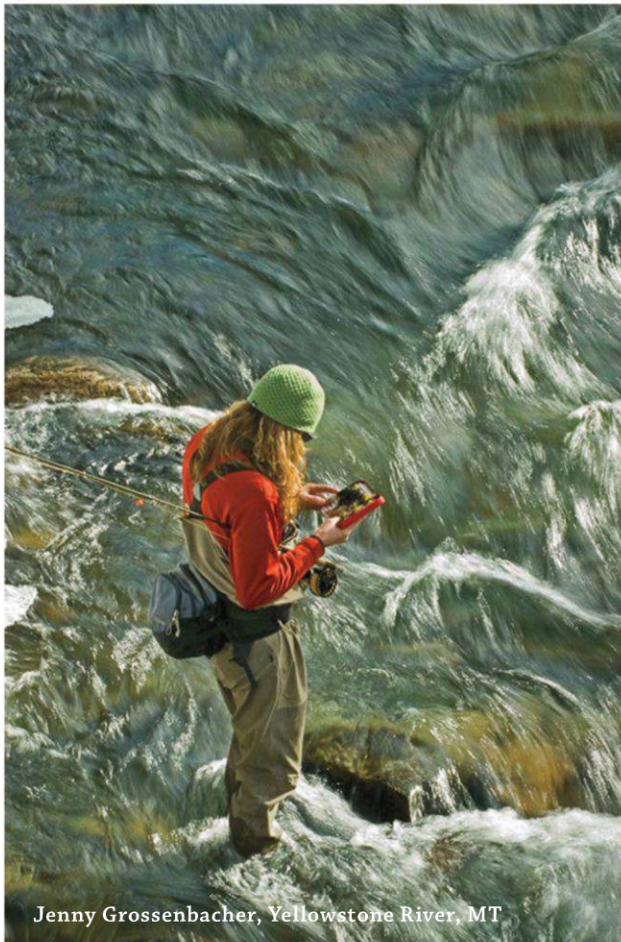
Jenny Grossenbacher guides fly fishers, writes books and raises children in Bozeman, Montana. She's been a dancer, a backpacking guide and a grizzly bear researcher. She's surveyed songbirds in the wild Gallatin Range south of her home. The woman knows her way around. Recently, she sat down with veteran Montana journalist Scott McMillion to talk about her life in the land of wild bears and wild rivers.

McMillion: You've rowed your boat on a lot of fantastic rivers. You even guided Oprah Winfrey for her TV show. What do you consider your home water?

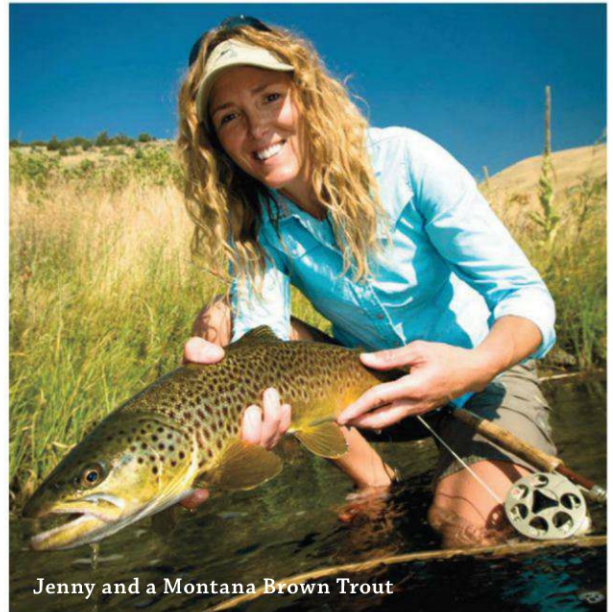
Grossenbacher: I love the Yellowstone River and I'd fish it every day if I could. We work about 125 miles of it, so we're always discovering something new. Since the river alters itself with the flows and the seasons, if you don't fish a certain stretch for a few days, things change by the time you get back to it and you get to explore it all over again.

SM: It's a wild river, no doubt about that, and it carries a lot of snowmelt every year. And we've resisted the temptation to tame it with dams.

JG: Amen. I love the wildness of that river. And every spring, after the peak runoff, I get excited to see what's changed. In 15 years of guiding, I've seen favorite runs disappear while whole new channels have been created. That's part of the magic, all that power and dynamism. It's always an adventure.



Jenny Grossenbacher, Yellowstone River, MT



Jenny and a Montana Brown Trout

SM: Speaking of power and dynamism, tell me about your work with grizzly bears.

JG: I worked in Glacier National Park and in Yellowstone, doing backcountry observations to figure out what they're eating and when. In Glacier, we documented them eating army cutworm moths – as many as 20,000 a day, every one of them with a gram of fat in it, the type of food they need to get them through the winter. They'd roll over big rocks and the moths would just swarm. They'd bat them down and shovel them in.

SM: That had to be fascinating. But was there a take-home lesson in that work?

JG: In a way, wild grizzlies and wild rivers are a lot alike. They're so much bigger than you, and not just in size. They both command so much respect and make you pay attention.

SM: How come you're still living in Montana?

JG: I grew up in Texas and in college I joined Up With People, a performing group that toured nine countries and 25 states. When we came to Montana, I just fell in love with it. When I met my husband, Brian, he got me started fly fishing. So we came to Montana 20 years ago and we made this life here: fishing, writing, photography, family. Being on the water every day, it feeds you in a way that most other jobs can't.

SM: Do you try to help your clients enjoy it as much as you do?

JG: You just get them in the boat and let them be themselves, share the Montana rivers with them. Sometimes I tease them and tell them to quit looking at the scenery and watch their fly, to get ready to set the hook. But I get to spend time with people who are on vacation, who are happy to be here and they're in awe of where I live and what I get to do every day. They always keep it fresh for me, remind me that where I live is a pretty amazing place.

View more Montana stories, including Jenny's at VISITMT.COM/MONTANA-STORIES

Power to the Real People

How to navigate the changing world of user-generated reviews

WANT TO START AN ARGUMENT? Just bring up the topic of user-generated reviews to a group of well-traveled friends. You know ... those ratings by “real” people found on TripAdvisor, Yelp, and the like. Many travelers swear by ‘em. But there’s a vocal minority who think they’re deeply flawed, maybe even fraudulent. ¶ Both are right, in a way. In principle, user-generated reviews are an ideal way to find honest opinions from folks just like us; they can be more useful for hotel and restaurant recommendations

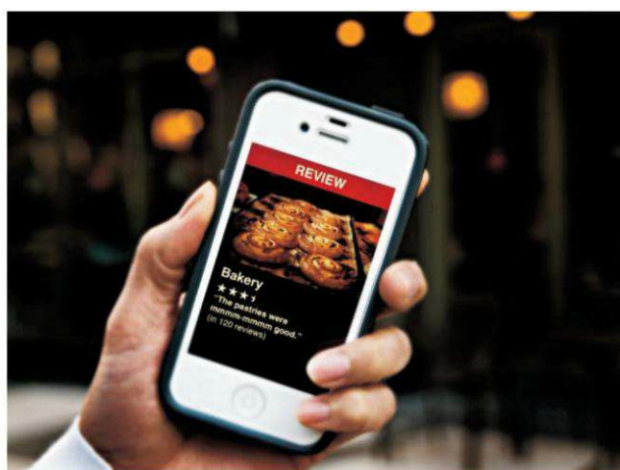
than a guidebook, which is outdated almost from the moment it rolls off the press. But in practice, they’ve been tainted by the travel industry. Some of the reviews on these sites are bogus, and even the real ones are written by people with an extreme experience to report—either an exceptionally good one or an outrageously bad one. As a result, user-generated reviews paint a picture that’s distorted at best and, at worst, downright deceptive.

So what’s the problem? You. More than 81 percent of hotel guests say they’re influenced by these online reviews, which means there’s a better-than-average chance you’ve clicked on a hotel rating, read it, believed it, and booked a room based on the write-up. You really shouldn’t do that.

I shouldn’t either, but, like you, I can’t seem to help it. I consult these sites regularly (I especially love Yelp’s smart phone app, with its Foursquare-like check-ins from my phone). I’ve chosen restaurants and hotels based on these ratings. It’s human nature, even when we know the source is flawed.

I’ve watched the evolution of hotel and restaurant reviews over the years. Just a decade ago, you had to turn to a travel agent, a trusted guidebook, or a magazine like this one for information about a destination. The two dominant sites, TripAdvisor and Yelp, promised democracy of opinion. (TripAdvisor started in 2000; Yelp in 2004.) But they evolved into more of a dictatorship. The Internet didn’t so much challenge the old hegemony as create a new one, siphoning the power from old media, and establishing a few powerful key players. Interestingly, the information revolution didn’t set information free; it consolidated it.

Having just a couple of dominant sites makes it far too easy for hotels and restaurants to manipulate them. The antics range from



Influence peddlers: Many people are guided by online reviews.

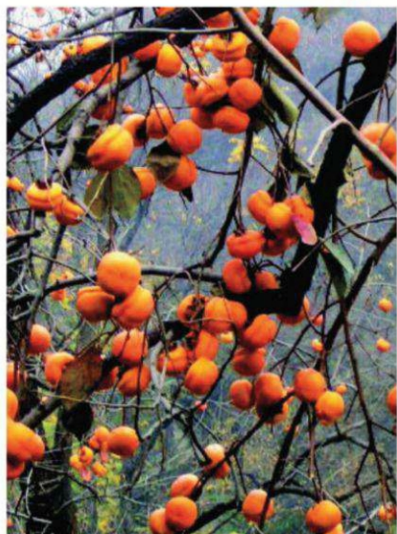
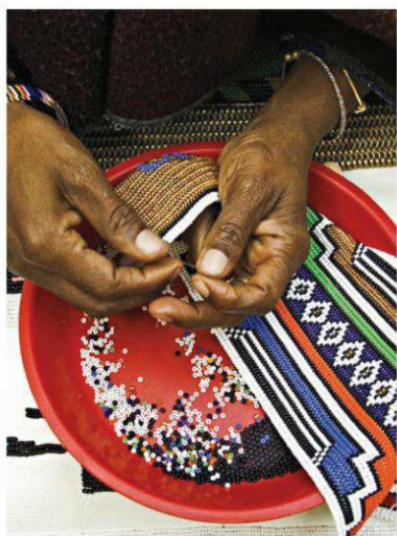
Having just a couple of dominant sites made it far too easy for hotels and restaurants to manipulate them.

an exposé on user-generated reviews. The emerging field of online reputation management specializes in making businesses look better than they are. In the hands of the practitioners of these dark arts, online sites stand little chance. Last year, TripAdvisor essentially admitted to its credibility problem when it changed its hotel review section slogan from “reviews you can trust” to “reviews from our community” in response to a British Advertising Standards Agency investigation. The review sites continue to insist their ratings are truthful. TripAdvisor claims it employs moderators who screen out “questionable” reviews. It also uses automated tools to review content and flag bogus ratings, but it won’t give details, insisting that explaining the system would help people game it. Yelp, too, says it has an almost foolproof fraud-detection algorithm, but businesses complain that it ensnares as many legitimate reviews as it does bogus ones. Nice try, guys.

But hegemonies don’t last forever. A decade is an eternity in Internet time. New websites that allow you to review your airline seat, hotel room, or restaurant are springing up, chipping away at the primacy of the big review sites. For example, Starwood Hotels

paying guests and even nonguests to write positive reviews about a business, to companies creating fake accounts and using them to badmouth their competition. Take the example of a restaurateur in Costa Rica who created multiple fake TripAdvisor accounts, including—I’m not making this up—“Debbie from Dallas,” and bombarded the site with positive reviews about his tavern. “Within days I was rated a perfect five,” he bragged. “During that same time my competitors’ ratings mysteriously declined.” I passed the information on to the *Today* show, which interviewed him for

EXPERIENCE LIFE-ENRICHING TRAVEL



TOP LEFT: Traditional beadwork; TOP RIGHT: Donau-Auen National Park (photo: Kovacs); BOTTOM LEFT: Persimmon orchard in Ming Dynasty Village; BOTTOM RIGHT: Atlantic rain forest photography exhibition (photo: Adriano Gambarini)

Preserving a vanishing village

InterContinental Beijing Beichen sustains a disappearing way of life by adopting a Ming Dynasty Village where only the oldest generation still remains. Hotel colleagues harvest steep mountain orchards, help market crops, maintain village homes, and connect guests with this authentic local treasure.

Revealing rain forest wonders

InterContinental São Paulo showcases the importance of rain forest preservation by bringing guests an incredible photo exhibition. Nature experts and National Geographic images document World Wildlife Fund expeditions exploring the rare and threatened world of Brazil's Atlantic rain forest.

InterContinental Hotels & Resorts pour time, energy, and resources into protecting special places for one simple reason: We believe it is important.

Preserving the nature, cultural heritage, and authentic communities that make each destination unique is essential to helping our guests experience truly life-enriching travel, broaden their outlook, and gain far more than a snapshot appreciation of the world's remarkable people and landscapes.

Our global partnership with National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations has reflected this shared passion for sustaining and enhancing distinctive places. Here are just a few inspiring examples of how our hotels make a difference throughout the year.

Celebrating cultural heritage

InterContinental Johannesburg O.R. Tambo Airport supports and promotes traditional crafts and heritage by inviting women from the region's KwaNdebele culture to demonstrate their intricate skills in beadwork—educating guests on the craft's historical significance and creating new opportunities for the artists.

Protecting an endangered habitat

InterContinental Vienna helps preserve Donau-Auen National Park, Central Europe's last major wetland environment. Volunteers restore forests, revitalize creeks, create new habitats, and replenish native flora to ensure survival of many endangered birds, fish, and animals in this protected refuge home.



See more examples of how we preserve and protect distinctive destinations at
intercontinental.com/responsible



recently announced it would allow guests to post reviews on its hotel sites (including Four Points, Sheraton, and W hotels) and promised to let customers tell it the way it is. Marriott announced a similar program. Online travel agency Travelocity unveiled a new feature last fall allowing travelers to submit questions about a hotel and to get feedback from fellow travelers or the hotel.

Everyone is getting in on the act, from online behemoths such as Google, with its new Google Places that allows you to rate businesses, to niche players such as LuxuryHotelist.com, which aggregates user reviews of upscale hotels from Priceline.com, Booking.com, and social media.

So, wait. Why would companies who might actively engage in reputation management on the one hand allow objective reviews on their own sites on the other? Robert Cole, founder of travel consulting company RockCheetah, invokes Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu, who advised keeping your friends close and your enemies closer. "Overcoming the fear of a guest airing a hotel's dirty laundry on their own website, hotel chains have come to the conclusion that if these views are being expressed, it is better to have an opportunity to apologize, explain, or respond," he says.

When I ask travelers how they factor user-generated reviews into their booking decisions, some of them sound like David Farnham, a *Traveler* subscriber from Roanoke, Virginia. "I don't believe everything I read," he says. Specifically, he doubts reviews that are excessively positive or negative. A second step is now required. Taking a look at the biggies is still important, but so is casting a wide net for blogs, review sites, and even company-sponsored reviews. This diffused information is a welcome development, because reputation managers, who might easily trick one or two sites, are hard-pressed to do the same for hundreds of information resources. Every click dismantles the hegemony—and helps you.

The lesson is clear: To make a vacation decision based on TripAdvisor reviews or to pick a restaurant solely on Yelp is folly. Such blind faith in a broken system could ruin your trip. But aggregating recommendations from friends, user-generated reviews, travel agents, and yeah, even the observations of an old-school magazine writer—that's the right call. ■

Editor at large CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT also addresses readers' travel problems. E-mail your story to celliott@ngs.org.

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Continental Divide

Is tourism too big a gamble for Antarctica?

SHOULD I STAY or should I go? ¶ Here's my recurring dream of Antarctica: I'm walking on a frozen landscape dotted with blue-tinted icebergs. Stately emperor penguins walk near me as seals rocket out of ice holes and skid to a stop. I hop into a Zodiac and glide through the chilly waters of the least explored land on Earth. It's just my kind of place—wild and unconquered. So why am I hesitating to pack my parka and turn this dream into a reality? ¶ Back in 2003, I led an international research team to study how

tourists were morphing from sedentary vacationers sipping mimosas by the hotel pool into hardy adventurers tasting bush brew in the rain forest. The resulting publication, "Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism's Global Footprint," confirmed that our vacations are expanding into Earth's last wild frontiers. Not all of that is a bad thing, but it made me wonder whether the risks of exposing Antarctica to North Face-wearing, camera-heavy humans—while the fragile continent is already under assault from carbon overload—can be justified. Unlike other places, where local communities rely on the income from tourism dollars and can become active partners in conservation as a result, there are no locals in Antarctica. Its year-round population consists of some 1,100 shivering scientists from all over the world.

According to the 108-member International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), whose mission includes advocating for more environmentally responsible tourism, those scientists can use some help. "The benefits derived from sustainable tourism, such as better knowledge and appreciation of Antarctica, are substantial," says Steve Wellmeier, IAATO's executive director. He notes that IAATO member companies and their passengers contributed more than \$2.3 million over the past seven years to scientific and conservation efforts in Antarctica and the subantarctic region. And he points out, rightly, that Antarctica offers a remarkable educational experience for travelers, promoting greater awareness to protect it. Indeed, at a time when nations are salivating over Antarctica's untapped minerals and oil reserves, tourism's ability to stave off industrial exploitation could be the continent's great salvation.

Yet, most efforts remain voluntary, and there are growing

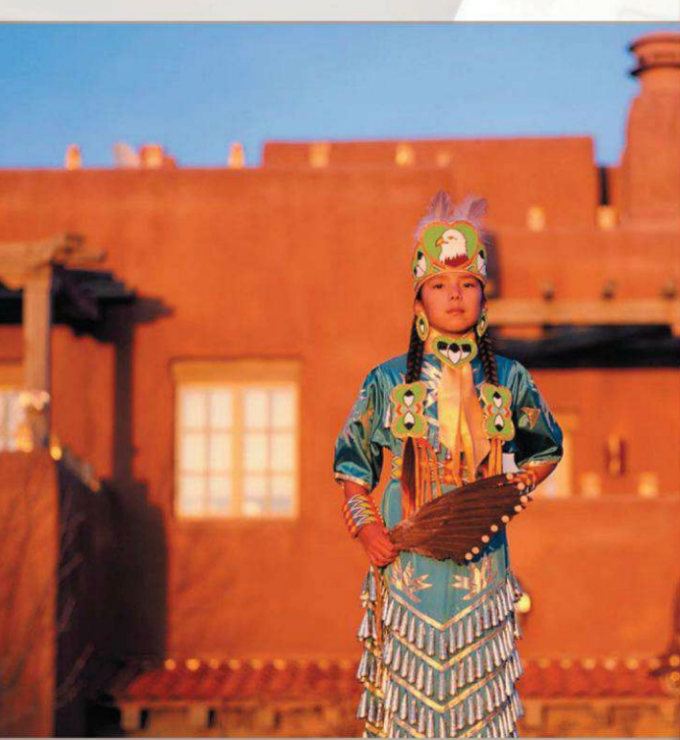


Iceberg ahead: A ship brings visitors to the pristine White Continent.

Since 1986, when fewer than a thousand tourists journeyed to Antarctica, the numbers have grown dramatically.

concerns that profit-minded tour companies offering "unforgettable Antarctica voyages with confidence and style for every kind of traveler," as one brochure advertises, just might become an ecological threat themselves. We could be just an oil spill away from destroying the pristine environment we marvel at: Four years ago, the *M.S. Explorer*, operated by Toronto-based Gap Adventures (since renamed G Adventures), slammed into an iceberg, sending 154 passengers and crew into lifeboats as the ship sank into Antarctica's cobalt waters, holding thousands of gallons of fuel oil and leaking at least some of it. (Disclosure: National Geographic Society also runs tours to Antarctica in partnership with Lindblad, and its expedition cruise ship was the first to respond to the ship's distress signal and offer aid.) The *Explorer* was an IAATO member pledged to uphold the organization's high standards, but an independent investigation found that the captain had misjudged the ice conditions and that the engine room hatch had faulty seals, which contributed to the ship going down. Wellmeier described the investigation report as "a wake-up call for our members." Since then, however, four other tourist ships have struck uncharted rocks or run aground, setting off more international alarm bells. Dutch researcher Machiel Lamers, who has studied the impact of tourism on Antarctica, has said that self-regulation among tour operators is not enough.

Since 1986, when fewer than a thousand intrepid tourists journeyed to Antarctica, the numbers have grown dramatically, reaching 46,069 in 2008, before the economic recession slowed things down. But with more than 25,000 visitors still making the trip this year, fears about potential harm to Antarctica's



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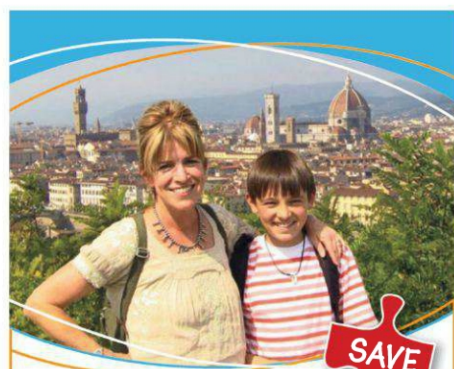
delicate ecosystems continue. A study led by scientists at the University of Madrid found that damage to slow-growing vegetation in Antarctica's extreme climate can occur with as little as 20 foot-steps, in addition to the introduction of invasive species and changes in the behavior of wildlife. The largest impact remains the trip to get there—each tourist generates approximately 4.4 tons of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming, the single greatest threat to Antarctica. The World Tourism Organization predicts that global tourism, spearheaded by the growing economies of China and India, will almost double from nearly 900 million international travelers last year to some 1.6 billion in 2020. As these vacationers hit the road and the sea, it may be just a matter of time before Antarctica reaches a crisis point.

The bright side in all of this (yep, there's a bright side) is that the voices calling for stricter travel regulations are more authoritative and numerous. In 2009, voting members of the Antarctic Treaty (no single country has jurisdiction over Antarctica) agreed to ban trips to shore from cruise ships carrying more than 500 passengers. And last August, the International Maritime Organization halted the use and transport of heavy fuel oil by visiting ships, reducing the risk of damaging spills. It's a start.

Few are calling for an outright halt to tourism on the White Continent. The challenge is to get the balance right. Researchers at Maastricht University in the Netherlands have proposed limiting the number of "tourism days" each year and auctioning them off to the highest-bidding travel companies, with the income going to support monitoring. But visiting Antarctica should not be only for those who can fork over the most cash. Rather, I think there should be an international lottery system offering a limited number of permits that gives all tour outfitters a chance, provided they commit to environmentally friendly practices and support for conservation.

My advice to travelers eager to visit: Find out if the tour company is a member of IAATO—it should be—and ask about its efforts to protect Antarctica and how you can be part of those efforts. Most companies know that it is simply good business to respond to customer choices. When enough travelers make conservation a fundamental goal of their Antarctica trips, we have a chance to get tourism there right. Come to think of it, I should go—on those terms. ■

Editor at large **COSTAS CHRIST** writes about sustainability issues.



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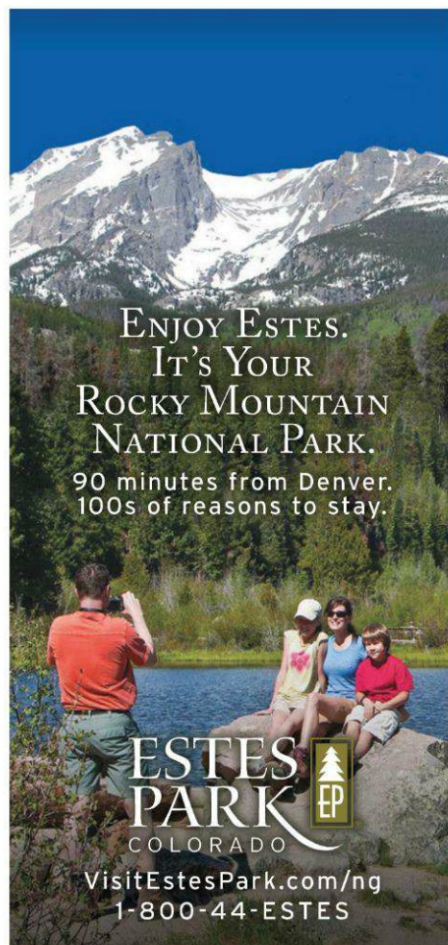
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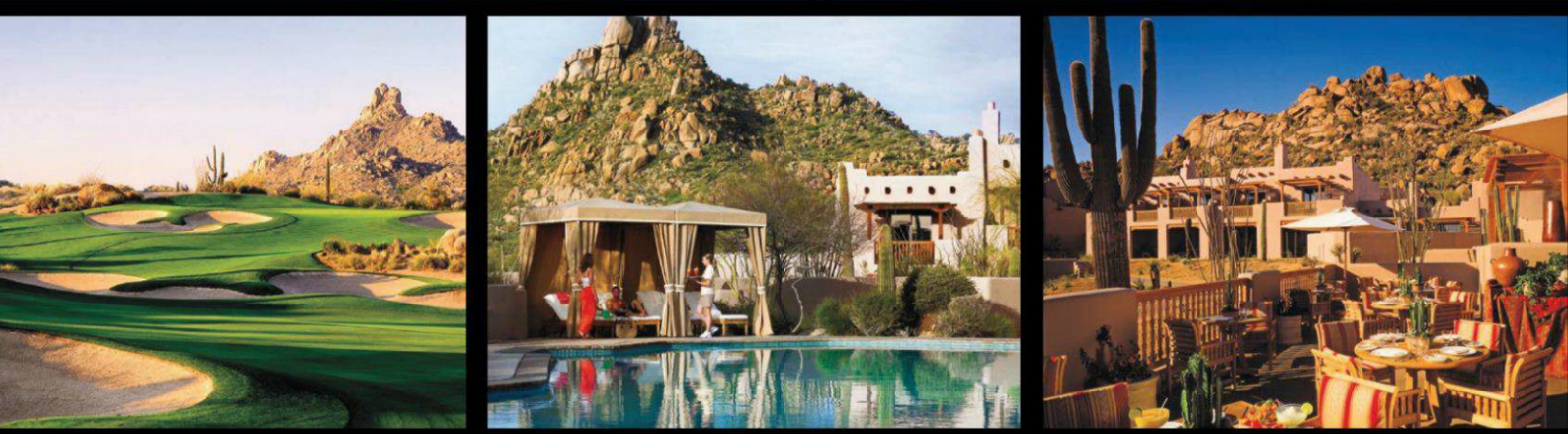
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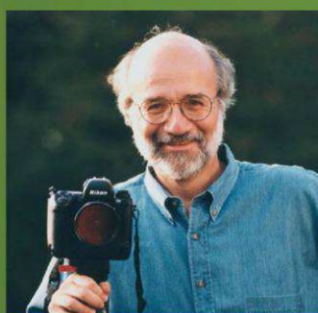
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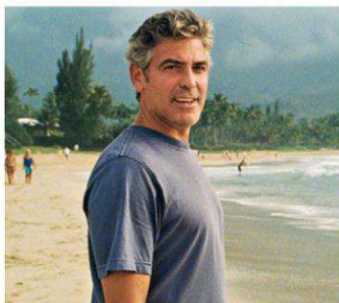
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SMART TRAVELER

[TRAVEL AT ITS BEST]



Beauty shots: Austria (*Sound of Music*), India (*Slumdog Millionaire*), England (*Harry Potter*), and Hawaii (*The Descendants*).

Location, Location, Location

Here's to the landscapes that star on the big screen and stoke our wanderlust | **By ROBERT KAHN**

HAWAII, IT'S TIME for your close-up. Moviegoers are abuzz over Steven Spielberg's *War Horse*, filmed in the United Kingdom, and *The Descendants*, with George Clooney as a flustered father sputtering around the 50th state. Sure, Spielberg and Clooney lure cinephiles to the multiplex, but so do vistas of the British countryside and Kauai shoreline. Actors may score the accolades, but there are landscapes with as much presence and compelling beauty as any celluloid star.

Movies move us both emotionally *and* physically. Locations depicted on screen often see a boost in tourism. The most well-known example is New Zealand, which saw hordes of visitors with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Mississippi tourism officials

say *The Help* also lured crowds to the state. "We want to visit the places our favorite movie characters do and experience just a smidge of what they did on screen," says Thom Geier, senior editor at *Entertainment Weekly*, who notes that even films lacking box office oomph can inspire travel: "Who can remember the plot for *The Tourist*, anyway? But Johnny Depp and Angelina Jolie's hotel room balcony—with that view of St. Mark's Square in Venice—is unforgettable." (It's the Hotel Danieli, if you must know.)

We canvassed production designers, cinema professors, location scouts, and our own DVD collections in search of the most memorable destinations on the silver screen.

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SCAN FOR VIDEO TOUR





Clockwise from top left: The iconic view from Florence's Hotel degli Orati, made famous in *A Room with a View*; a jogger striking the oft-imitated *Rocky* pose on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and a movie still from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, filmed in New York City and starring Audrey Hepburn.

BEST INDUCEMENT FOR TAKING THE KIDS TO EUROPE

England

Visit Oxford University's Christ Church college, real-life inspiration for the Great Hall of Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* series. In April Warner Bros. opens a "Making of *Harry Potter*" tour at Leavesden Studios, northwest of London, in homage to the decade-long series. See costumes, props, and entire sets, including Dumbledore's study and the Great Hall itself.

TOP 'HOOD TO BURN OFF CHEESESTEAK CALORIES

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Yo, Adrian! Fresh salami! In *Rocky*, persistent pugilist Rocky Balboa made his daily training rounds with a morning run through the outdoor Italian Market on Ninth Street; you'll still find cheese and meat vendors there, with Mexican and Asian influences that have flourished since the 1976 film. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, run up the 72 stone steps, throw your arms in the air, then run down and pose with the Stallone statue, a prop from *Rocky III*.

COMPELLING BLEND OF BEAUTY AND GRIT

Mumbai, India

In *Slumdog Millionaire*, Jamal (Dev Patel) can triumph on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* because of his experiences growing up in Mumbai's Dharavi, among the largest slums in Asia. Director Danny Boyle's captivating portrait of the ramshackle community turned it into a destination as relevant as the Taj Mahal: A handful of

tour companies now specialize in Dharavi expeditions that focus on the challenges facing India.

MOLTO ROMANTICO VIEW FROM A PENSIONE WINDOW

Florence, Italy

The young lovers in the 1985 *A Room with a View* first cross paths at the "Pensione Bertolini," now the Hotel degli Orati. To drink in the view that brought George and Lucy together, request Room 414, with its terrace overlooking the Arno River.

GREAT UNTOUCHED ISLANDS

Galápagos, Ecuador

With *Master and Commander*, a 2003 nautical adventure set during the Napoleonic Wars, Peter Weir became the only director to shoot a feature film on the mysterious and volcanic South American archipelago filled with exotic animals. He spent months justifying his plans to Ecuadorian government and park officials; all equipment was

hand-carried and removed from the islands each night.

SUPER SCENIC SPOT FOR A LOVE TRIANGLE, NORTH OF THE BORDER

Vancouver, Canada

The adaptation of the first installment of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga was filmed in Washington State's Olympic Peninsula; with the sequels, production moved north. Twi-hards can seek out the woods where the wolves and vampires run, and the theater where Bella went to the movies with Jacob and Mike in *New Moon*. It is in a heritage building in New Westminster.

SUPER SCENIC SPOT FOR A LOVE TRIANGLE, SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Oaxaca, Mexico

In *Y Tu Mamá También*, wealthy teens Julio and Tenoch meet a sultry older woman at a wedding, and the three embark on a road trip in search of a beach, "La Boca del

Cielo." The sublime seaside scenery for this 2001 movie was filmed at Playa Cacaluta, near Huatulco in the state of Oaxaca.

SUPREME DUNES FOR A DOUBLE FEATURE

Tunisia

When Luke Skywalker stares out at the two suns of Tatooine in the first *Star Wars* (1977), he's standing amid the golden dunes of Shott el Jerid, a salt lake in the Tunisian Sahara. The opposite shore was base camp for Count Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) in *The English Patient*, the 1996 Best Picture Oscar winner.

BEST CITY FOR DREAM-MAKING AND HEART-BREAKING

New York City

Audrey Hepburn's socialite Holly Golightly navigates an idealized Big Apple in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), with stops at the Plaza Hotel and the posh jeweler.

BEST TOWN TO HIT THE HIGH NOTES IN YOUR LEDERHOSEN

Salzburg, Austria

The Von Trapp kids and Fraulein Maria begin "Do-Re-Mi" atop the Mönchsberg Cliffs on Winkler Terrace in the 1965 classic *Sound of Music*. Later, they take to the steps at Mirabell Gardens. Guided tours are available.

BEST SPOT TO PRETEND YOU'RE A PARISIAN

Montmartre, Paris

Like the title character of the Audrey Tautou romantic comedy *Amélie*, the neighborhood of La Butte is charming, curious, and eccentric. After describing the





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Clockwise from top left: There are many intimate cafés in the Montmartre district in Paris, locale for *Amélie*; visitors arrive on Skiathos, one of the Greek islands where *Mamma Mia* was filmed; *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* was shot on location in Australia's Northern Territory.

busy markets along Rue Lamarck to a blind man, Amélie escorts him to the Metro Lamarck-Caulaincourt, with its delightful double staircase. At Café des 2 Moulins, where Amélie waitresses and schemes about her neighbors, you can order the crème brûlée, named for the do-gooder herself.

BEST BACKDROP FOR LIONS AND LONGING

Kenya

Out of Africa won seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, in 1985. Visit the Karen Blixen museum, on the outskirts of Nairobi, or take a ride in a Waco biplane, similar to the Tiger Moth that Denys Finch-Hatton (played by Robert Redford) used to fly over the African savanna.

TOP REGION FOR A GRAPE-STAINED BUDDY ROAD TRIP

California's Central Coast

Paul Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church squelch middle-age malaise with a wine tour around Santa Barbara in the 2004 film *Sideways*. They stop at Sanford Winery in Buellton, top off at Foxen Winery in Santa Maria, and meet sexy Sandra Oh at Kalyra Winery in Santa Ynez.

SUPERLATIVE JAMES BOND ISLAND

Jamaica

In 1962's *Dr. No*, Agent 007 first encounters Honey Ryder (Ursula Andress, with a diver's knife tucked into her bikini) at Laughing Waters Beach, near Ocho Rios; not far away is novelist Ian Fleming's former estate, now the luxury resort GoldenEye.

TOP HOTEL FOR LOST SOULS TO CONNECT

Tokyo, Japan

Bill Murray has a chance meeting with Scarlett Johansson at the Park Hyatt Tokyo, atop Shinjuku Park Tower in *Lost in Translation* (2003). The hotel intensifies their sense of dislocation; when the depressive duo venture out, they drift into Shibuya, the entertainment district. Karaoke, anyone?

BEST PERCH TO BELT ABBA SONGS

Sporades Islands and the mainland of Greece

Single mom Meryl Streep dances and jives around Skopelos and

Skiathos, two of the Sporades islands in *Mamma Mia!* (2008); a wedding, on the northwestern tip of Skopelos, unfolds in a chapel with soul-stirring views of the blue Aegean. The breezy climax of "Dancing Queen" is set on the Pelion coast of mainland Greece, about 25 miles northwest of the Sporades.

GREAT GORGES TO LOOK ABSOLUTELY GORGEOUS

Northern Territory, Australia

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994) follows two drag queens and a transsexual as they hit the road for a cabaret gig at Lasseters Hotel Casino in Alice Springs. As the grand finale,



actor Guy Pearce and pals climb King's Canyon.

BEST SPOTS TO BECOME ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE

Haryana, India, and Ubud, Bali, Indonesia

After filling up on pasta and gelati in Rome, Julia Roberts in 2010's *Eat Pray Love* gets down to the business of finding herself at a gritty ashram in Pataudi, outside Delhi. Then she continues her spiritual transformation in a tiny cottage in Bali, surrounded by green rice paddies.

WORST PLACE TO FORGET YOUR GPS

Denali National Park, Alaska

Park officials say the best thing to bring is "common sense" if you intend to visit abandoned Bus 142 on the beautiful but unforgiving Stampede Trail, where the real Christopher McCandless depicted in the book and 2007 movie *Into the Wild* starved to death. The six-million-acre park and preserve is home to Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America.

GREAT CAMEO BY A HUMONGOUS WATERFALL

Iguazú Falls, on the border of Brazil and Argentina

The breathtaking break in the Iguazú River plays a starring role in *The Mission*, the 1986 film about a Jesuit priest. It's a dream destination for a gay Hong Kong couple in 1997's *Happy Together*. And, finally, is a central location in the 2008 swashbuckler *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. You can get there from major airports on either side of the border. ■

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Antebellum attraction: Oaks shade the College of Charleston's Cistern.

48 HOURS

South Carolina Gold

Charleston's stately manors still gleam, but indie shops and top chefs give the city fresh polish | **By MARGARET LOFTUS**

THE PAST LOOMS LARGE in Charleston. Residents reelected their mayor for a tenth term last November, and reminders both of a certain war that began here and of antebellum times appear everywhere. So it was a bit of a blow last year when the South Carolina port city landed on the watch lists of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the World Monument Fund, due to the recent rise in cruise-ship traffic. Locals had already been debating whether the historic district could absorb the thousands of day-trippers disgorged from cruise ships while maintaining its integrity and charm.

At the same time, a renewed creative energy has been quietly gaining strength. You'll notice it at Sean Brock's heralded restaurant Husk and at the shops young entrepreneurs and artisans are setting up on the fringes of the historic district.

WHAT TO DO Get your bearings with a sunrise stroll along the **Battery**, the promenade that skirts the tip of the Charleston peninsula between the Cooper and Ashley Rivers. Many of the antebellum mansions fronting the path were built by

18th-century plantation owners as summer retreats from the oppressive inland heat. The cannons in **White Point Gardens** pointing toward the water hark back to the Civil War, when the park was the city's last line of defense against attacks from Union strongholds across the harbor. From here, you can spot **Fort Sumter**, where the war began in 1861, off to the southeast.

Meander up to **Meeting Street**, peeking past wrought-iron gates at the gardens of stately homes graced with Lady Banks rose vines. Several houses are open to the public, including the **Calhoun Mansion**, an Italianate manor built by local businessman George Walton Williams in 1876 as a testament to his faith in Charleston's resurgence after the Civil War.

Retail chains dominate King, the main shopping drag, but indie gems including **Worthwhile**, a boutique that carries edgy women's wear labels such as Gasa and Gary Graham, warrant a perusal. **Heirloom Books**, a paean to cookbooks vintage and hot off the press, joined established clothing shops and antiques stores along lower King when it opened last summer. To brush up on your Southern authors, head north to **Blue Bicycle Books**, owned

by local scribe Jonathan Sanchez, to lose yourself in the narrow aisles. "People come to Charleston to slow down and reconnect," says Sanchez, "so seeing a book signed by Margaret Mitchell or an old copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* really resonates with them."

Cobblestones once paved the streets of the French Quarter east of King. Here, more than 40 enclosed slave sites were housed, helping to make Charleston the richest city in the South. The **Old Slave Mart Museum**, opened in 2007, chronicles this trade through oral histories, letters, and artifacts, including shackles and iron-work forged by black artisans.

Graveyards are tucked throughout the **Holy City**, a nickname that partly refers to the scores of steeples that dominate the skyline. Several prominent Charlestonians are buried in the stone crypts and below the crape myrtles in the cemeteries adjacent to the 17th-century **St. Philip's Church**, including Governor Edward Rutledge, who at 26 was the youngest signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Around the block, the beaux arts **Gibbes Museum of Art** depicts the region's tumultuous history. Don't miss the ethereal watercolor landscapes by Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, part of a community of painters who used the Low Country's faded glory as romantic inspiration.

Spoletto USA spans only a couple of weeks in the spring, but the festival has fostered a rich performing arts tradition for a city of around 120,000, thanks to a range of venues. The grande dame is the **Dock Street Theatre**, which caught the eye of Spoleto's Italian founder, Gian Carlo Menotti, when he was scouting for a state-side host back in 1977. Constructed in



1736, Dock Street was the first building in the United States purposely constructed as a theater.

WHERE TO EAT Chef Sean Brock first shook up Charleston stalwart **McCrary's** with his postmodern gastronomy magic, but he has most recently won national raves for his strictly locavore **Husk**. The restaurant is located in a 19th-century French Quarter townhouse, where Brock coaxes regional heirloom ingredients, such as Carolina Gold rice and Ossabaw pork, to shine in dishes like Hoppin' John.

Fellow farm-to-table champion chef Mike Lata presides at neighborhood bistro **Fig**. No reservations? Perch at the bar and nurse a Negroni—there are nine varieties to choose from—while you wait for a starter of oysters with lemon Char-donnay mignonette.

For brunch, make the short trek across the Ashley River to the **Glass Onion**, a diner on busy Route 17, for the crispy braised pork belly with poached eggs and grits.

At lunchtime, college students usually swarm gourmet grocery **Caviar & Bananas**, so take your duck confit sourdough sandwich a block down George Street to picnic at the College of Charleston's Cistern, a courtyard shaded by trees strewn with Spanish moss. Or head uptown and find a spot at the communal table at the new **Butcher and Bee**. Its compact menu of four to six sandwiches using house-made bread changes daily, but the vegan pulled squash barbecue with smoky slaw is a recurring favorite.

WHERE TO STAY You'll know the **Wentworth Mansion** (from \$279), built by a wealthy cotton merchant, by its mansard roof and cupola. The elaborate interior of the 21-room inn features original Tiffany glass panels and marble mantels.

The 15 ample suites at **Restoration on King** (from \$269) come with exposed brick walls, hardwood floors, full kitchens, washers, and dryers. A picnic breakfast is delivered to your door every morning, and bikes and iPads are available.

Bed-and-breakfasts abound, but one of the best located is the 19th-century **Battery Carriage House** (from \$150), right on White Point Gardens. Several of its 11 rooms are reportedly haunted, such as Room 10, said to be visited by a ghostly gentleman caller. The **King George IV Inn** (from \$99) is in a circa 1790 Charleston single—a one-room-wide house with a two-story veranda (or piazza, as it's known locally). The ten guest rooms boast fireplaces and antiques. ■

[ON FOOT]

WEST OF KING STREET

Head to this neighborhood for one-of-a-kind Charleston finds

A clutch of funky boutiques and stylish cafés have cropped up west of King Street in Charleston's Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood in the past year. Find them in and among the one-room-wide Charleston singles in this mostly residential area. "It's become a hotbed for creative businesses," says Rhett Boyd, who opened his surf shop on Spring Street last year.

Start your day with a plate of shrimp and grits at neighborhood anchor **Hominy Grill** (1). One of those rare spots beloved by visitors and locals alike, the restaurant recently expanded its space without sacrificing its familiar bead-board walls and tin ceiling. Then head east on Cannon Street to **Indigo and Cotton** (2), a handsome menswear shop that specializes in American heritage brands such as Quoddy moccasins. Slip across the street to the tiny jewel box that is **Mac & Murphy** (3) to browse chic stationery, including retro-cool letterpress cards made locally.

Time for a treat yet? **Sugar Bakeshop's** (4) owners, a couple of former New York architects, hit the cupcake lotto with their

Lady Baltimore version, studded with sherry-soaked figs.

Leigh Magar (*below*) makes hats the old-fashioned way, using blocks and hand-stitching, so each is one of a kind. Barneys

New York is a client, as are a slew of celebrities, including R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe. Visit Magar's 19th-century house cum studio **Magar Hatworks** (5) by appointment for a look at her latest creations.

A few blocks away is Boyd's **Rogue Wave Surf Shop** (6); the gregarious owner can fill you in on local surfing conditions and make sure you've got the right board and gear

from his well-edited selection.

Amble over to St. Philip Street to **Redux** (7), an arts center for contemporary works such as the recent origami installation by artist Liz Miller.

A feast awaits at **Two Boroughs Larder** (8), where Philadelphia transplants Heather and Josh Keeler offer a stand-out menu heavy on local bounty. Try the Magwood pickled shrimp or the crispy pig head sandwich with blue cheese, fried egg, and wilted greens. —M.L.



Magar Hatworks.





Twilight in Tuscany: Lanterns are lit for dinner on the terrace at Il Salviatino.

HOTEL CENTRAL

Living La Dolce Vita

At these refurbished castles and villas, guests are courted with the best of the Tuscan lifestyle | **By DAVID FARLEY**

IT'S NO SURPRISE that some of the most intriguing hotels in this central Italian region are not new at all. They've been carved out of castles and palaces and even entire *borghi* (villages), studded throughout this famous landscape. Once upon a time, these properties might have been off-limits to everyone but a few. Today, travelers looking to splurge can flip on the lights and stay for a night.

CASTELLO DELLE QUATTRO TORRA "The castle commands attention and arouses the curiosity of anyone passing through this area," says Nicola Guerrini, who owns and runs (along with his wife, Katerina) this *castello* a few miles outside Siena. And he's not exaggerating. The fortress called the "castle with the four towers," has been

in Guerrini's family since 1850. In 2003, the couple turned it into a B&B. Guerrini has been known to work wonders for guests—such as snagging tickets for the prestigious Palio dinner, the meal served in neighborhoods the night before the famous horse race in Siena. The apartment overlooks the property's olive groves and vineyard, and the blue room boasts views of Siena's Mangia Tower. From \$185.

BORGIO LA BAGNAIA Not many hotels can point guests to the on-site medieval church. Then again, most hotels aren't made up of an entire village. Welcome to Borgo La Bagnaia, a property that was the residence of Marisa Monti Riffeser's family for nearly 60 years before it became a hotel in 2003. It is this family spirit that

Monti Riffeser tries to spread throughout the property. Custom-designed tapestries and fabrics accent each of the 72 rooms and suites furnished with local antiques and objects Monti Riffeser collected during her travels. For guests looking to stretch their legs, the surrounding countryside makes a scenic hike or drive. Visit Chiusdino, a fortified town with a 14th-century abbey and charming medieval lanes that sits 1,800 feet above the lush Merse Valley. From \$328.

IL SALVIATINO A decade ago, this 15th-century Renaissance palace sat unloved and in a near-crumbling state on a hill in Fiesole, four miles from Florence. But \$20 million in renovations later, the palace is full of life. Most of the 45 high-ceilinged guest rooms, decorated with marble fireplaces and velvet-upholstered furniture, look out toward the hills of the Tuscan countryside or, in the distance, Florence's famed Duomo. Forty service ambassadors will arrange anything from a helicopter ride to Verona to a picnic for two on the Salviatino estate. "They'll even go with you, if you want," says Marcello Pigozzo, Il Salviatino's owner. From \$393. ■

AFFORDABLE VILLA STAYS

Where to hide away among the hill towns

For the classic Tuscan over-nighter, a villa is the way to go. There's not a paved road in sight around **Villa Bandita** (from \$295), a stylish eight-room B&B near Pienza, a UNESCO World

Heritage site. Pienza is the birthplace of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II). Visit his family home with panoramic views of the Val d'Orcia, also designated a World Heritage site for its valley

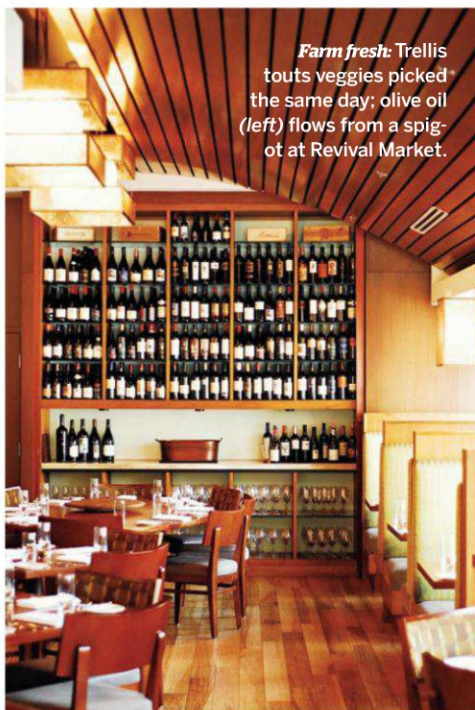
landscapes. In the Chianti region, **Villa I Barronci** (from \$105) offers large guest rooms and complimentary bicycles to explore the area's hill towns. **Villa il Poggiale** (from \$110), set between Siena and Florence, is a retreat decked out in frescoes and a garden pool surrounded by lavender. —D.F.



Villa Bandita.



Farm fresh: Trellis touts veggies picked the same day; olive oil (left) flows from a spigot at Revival Market.



TASTE OF TRAVEL

Trading Places

Farmers put on toques while chefs work the farm and travelers enjoy the fruits of their labor | **By ANDREA COOPER**

EVERYBODY KNOWS about the farm-to-fork movement. But what about restaurants where farmers do the cooking? Farmers turned chefs (and chefs turned farmers) are hoeing, harvesting, and sautéing across the United States. For a new generation of independent farmers who sell their goods directly to chefs, the move to cooking can be an unexpectedly natural progression. As for chefs, farming offers the joy of raising their own ingredients. Some restaurants open their companion farms for spring tours, giving “back to the land” a new meaning for diners.

A 19th-century brick building once home to a ship chandlery is now **Cinque Terre** and **Vignola**, two Italian restaurants in Portland, Maine, bound by their common

kitchen. Co-owner and chef Lee Skawinski selects varieties for the farm discovered on trips to Italy, and the kitchen crew helps harvest everything from tomatoes to 3,000 heads of garlic per season. Cinque Terre crafts traditional, multicourse meals inspired by the cuisine of Liguria in northwest Italy. Expect comforting dishes such as *zuppa di pesce* (fish soup) with potato and fennel, and ravioli with kale and braised lamb. Vignola is its breezy little sister, serving tavern fare: Terrines of Maine rabbit are a specialty. To catch a breeze yourself, take a stroll by the ocean across the street from the restaurants.

“It’s my wife’s fault,” says chef/farmer Kent Peters. “Since we’ve been married, we’ve filled the yard with stuff we can

eat.” That impulse led to creating the Black Creek Heritage Farm in Canal Winchester, Ohio, and later the **Black Creek Bistro**, nearby in Columbus. The bistro’s “eclectic American” menu features one of the farm’s heritage poultry breeds in a duck gnocchi and its produce made into a grilled zucchini soup served in a roasted baby pumpkin.

Farmers Natalie Veres and Cassie Parsons transported themselves into the restaurant business by way of a food truck. They fed bankers in downtown Charlotte, North Carolina, before opening **Harvest Moon Grille** next to the Dunhill Hotel. Parsons, a former corporate chef, oversees the kitchen but also helps feed and bring the hogs from their farm to the slaughterhouse. Veres manages the herd of pigs and bakes the restaurant’s bread. Of note: Almost all the ingredients served here come from small farms within 100 miles of Charlotte.

Try Harvest Moon’s pork chops served with a local moonshine sauce. Step outside the restaurant and you’re in shouting distance of the city’s history and art museums.

Revival Market in Houston is a grocery and café that features food grown in southeast Texas. Run by Morgan Weber and Ryan Pera, who also own Revival Farms in Yoakum, the market aims to infuse Texas with a little bit of Europe. “We wanted to do charcuterie as an Italian might, and smoke a brisket as a Texan,” Pera says, but don’t think that means high-fat food. One of the best-selling dishes: the hot dog, a combination of pork, beef, and chicken from the farm.

In the kitchen until 9 p.m. most nights, Brian Scheehser starts his day on his farm near Kirkland, Washington, with a list for **Trellis** in the Heathman Hotel, where he’s executive chef. Scheehser has become famous for his Two Hour Salad made with seasonal produce and harvested just two hours before serving. See where the salad starts by calling the restaurant to arrange a tour of the farm eight miles away. ■

EXTREME LOCAVORE

Dine on food grown and gathered on-site

Farms are opening restaurants within yards of the green fields. Here are a few to sample dishes served fresh from the garden. **The Farm at South Mountain** in Phoenix, Arizona, has

a ten-acre pecan grove and three restaurants with outdoor seating. At Quiescence, try the truffled spring vegetables *al cartoccio*, a mix of carrots, turnips, radishes, and sugar snap peas cooked in

parchment with sorrel aioli. Or go for comfort food finished off with pecan pie at the Farm Kitchen.

At **Elderberry Pond** in Auburn, New York, the hemlock board-and-batten dining room overlooks the 100-acre organic farm’s orchard. Open April to December, the Finger Lakes area restaurant

features the farm’s pasture-raised pork and heritage chicken served with newly dug fingerling potatoes. Not near those places?

Outstanding in the Field sets up tables at farms around the country and invites celebrated chefs to prepare meals using the farms’ bounty. —A.C.

FAMILY

Touring On Two Wheels

Pedal through uplifting scenery on these car-free trails | **By ALISSON CLARK**

MISSOURI > Follow Lewis and Clark's route past bluffs along the Missouri River on the 240-mile **Katy Trail**, a former railroad corridor that's the longest rail-to-trail in the United States. Day trip one way by shuttle bus, or, for a longer jaunt, overnight off the route in the 19th-century Weinstrasse Cabins in Augusta. The trail is open year-round, but spring offers some of the best scenery, with blooming dogwood and redbud trees along the river. Between St. Charles and Boonville—part of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail—stop for a closer look at a natural stone arch and view Native American rock paintings like those noted in Captain Clark's 1804 journal.

IDAHO > The **Route of the Hiawatha** (open late May-Oct.) traverses 15 scenic miles of the Bitterroot Mountains, crossing seven former railroad trestles. (Even better: A shuttle service transports riders between the Pearson and Roland trailheads, so there's no pedaling uphill.) Grab rental bikes fitted with lights at Lookout Pass Ski Area to navigate nine tunnels along the way, including the 1.7-mile Taft Tunnel, which crosses the Montana-Idaho state line.

CALIFORNIA > Bikes are welcome on the ferry from San Francisco to **Angel Island State Park**, a former immigration station known as the Ellis Island of the West. Adult- and kid-size bikes are available on the island,



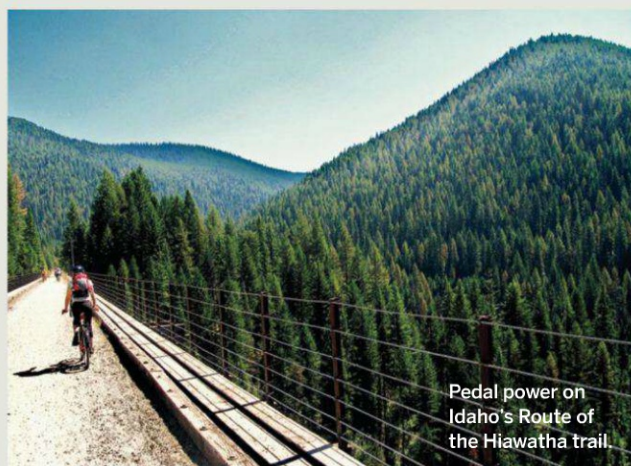
Governors Island.

but for trailers or tandems, stop by Blazing Saddles at Pier 41 before boarding the ferry. A five-mile lane rings the car-free island, where clifftop overlooks beckon for snack breaks and photo ops of the San Francisco skyline and the Golden Gate Bridge. Make time for a stroll on Quarry Beach, or a walk through the vine-covered ruins from the island's early history as a military base.

NEW YORK > Head to **Governors Island National Monument** (open weekends June 2-Sept. 30) for five miles of trails, including a 2.2-mile

waterfront loop with views of the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty. Hop on a free ferry from Manhattan's Battery Maritime Building or Pier 6 in Brooklyn Bridge Park to get to the island, where families can play miniature golf on a themed course that changes each year, explore two 19th-century forts, and picnic among large-scale sculptures scattered throughout the island. Foursomes can rent a quadricycle—the bike equivalent of a minivan—for extra pedal power around the promenade.

SOUTH CAROLINA > Bike to the beach and the pier at **Hunting Island State Park**, a barrier island with ten miles of bike trails. Climb to the top of an 1870s lighthouse, search for shark teeth at low tide, then pedal the Marsh Boardwalk trail, where a dock overlooking a tidal creek is a favorite spot for watching sunsets.



Pedal power on Idaho's Route of the Hiawatha trail.



Kentucky horses.

[ITINERARY]

LEXINGTON WITH KIDS

The "Horse Capital of the World" welcomes families with an interactive science museum, a hands-on garden just for kids, and lots of friendly foals.

In the **Children's Garden** at the **Arboretum**, youngsters plant flowers and vegetables, flutter among monarchs, and explore a tallgrass prairie maze.

Visit the **Kentucky Horse Park** to watch Appaloosa and Arabian horses promenade in the Parade of Breeds (runs March-Oct.). Amble through the majestic barns and stables to pet a Kentucky Derby winner's velvety nose and get up close to more than 50 breeds.

Keeneland Race Course—a National Historic Landmark—presents thoroughbred racing (April and October) in a grand parklike setting. Early Saturdays during races, observe horses going through their morning workouts. Afterward have breakfast alongside trainers in the track kitchen.

Harness the wind in a flight simulator and pedal a "brain bike" to power a computer at the **Explorium**, Kentucky's only children's museum.

Ogle famous bluegrass horse farms as you drive out scenic Old Frankfort Pike to **Wallace Station** for lunch. Order the Hot Brown, Kentucky's signature sandwich, served open-faced with turkey, ham, bacon, and melted cheddar.

—Margaret Buranen



Made in America: Kids get up close to the assembly line to see how things are made. At the **Jelly Belly Factory** in Fairfield, Calif., learn why it takes more than a week to make a single jelly bean, then sample the candy in flavors like bubblegum and kiwi. Climb on a giant mitt sculpture and swing a bat at Kentucky's **Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory**, where 1.8 million white ash wood baseball bats are made each year. Observe luthiers (a craftsman who makes stringed instruments) bind some of the world's best guitars at the **Gibson Guitar Factory** in Memphis, Tenn. —Jeannette Kimmel



Pastimes: Locals socialize near the 16th-century fountain in Évora's central square.

ROAD TRIP

Portugal in the Slow Lane

Trains whoosh from Lisbon to the Alentejo, but the region's riches shine brightest on a leisurely drive | **By JEANINE BARONE**

THE ANCIENT ROMANS had an eye for real estate. Beginning in the second century B.C., they set their sights on the Alentejo, a fertile land of undulating fields and marble deposits that all but guaranteed the good life. In the centuries that followed, the Moors, Christians, and others battled over this south-central region stretching from the Algarve to the Tagus (its name derived from *para além do Tejo*—"across the Tagus" from the perspective of Lisboa).

Today, this languid rural province neighboring Spain is Portugal's largest and sparsest, an antidote to the glitzy Algarve and bustling Lisbon: wide-open spaces to roam and medieval villages to explore, slowly. Virtually traffic-free roads vein a sun-baked landscape of knotted cork oaks, twisted olive trees, and tidy vineyards, while residents—the few and the proud—hold close a heritage rich in traditional food, wine, and handicrafts.

WRITING ON THE WALLS East from Lisbon, highways course through dense cork forests (see "Sniffing the Cork," page 41) and past whitewashed farmhouses and corduroy rows of grape fields. After about

80 miles, the fortified city of Évora, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1986, rises above the surrounding plains like a mirage from a distant past.

The compact, walkable town center's signature site is the granite-columned **Roman Temple**, built in the first or second century A.D. and considered Portugal's best-preserved Roman shrine. Savvy travelers detour to the little-visited excavation of Roman baths, tucked in the basement of the **Câmara Municipal** (open weekdays) in Praça do Sertório. Discovered in 1987, the circular ruins are said to have been a *laconicum* (hot room).

Meditate on mortality, as Franciscan monks did, at the macabre **Capela dos Ossos** ("chapel of bones"). An inscription above the entrance sets the tone—"We, the bones that are here, await yours."

Covering nearly every interior surface and pillar are the remnants of some 5,000 monks, retrieved in the 16th century from nearby cemeteries.

Sweeten the mood at **Pastelaria Conventual Pão de Rala** bakery. Try a regional specialty, the Santa Clara *pastéis*, an almond-flavored turnover named for a 13th-century Franciscan nun. Discover the Alentejo's grape-growing culture—renowned for its smooth, balanced red wines—at **Alentejo Wine Route** tasting room, a vaulted space with free samples and exhibits. Surrounding Évora, mostly to the west, 95 Neolithic granite monoliths punctuate the landscape down a network of dirt roads. (**Mendes and Murteira** tour guides help decipher hard-to-spot etchings of curious shapes.)

Just over three miles from the walled city is the luxe **Convento do Espinheiro Hotel and Spa**, a 15th-century convent where Princess Isabel of Aragon and Castile primed for her 1490 wedding to Prince Afonso. The old wine cellar is now a restaurant, and lunch is served in the former monks' gardens, fragrant with lavender and rosemary. Try the crumbled bread (*migas*) and pork cooked with clams.

Detour 14 miles northwest to Arraiolos, epicenter for handwoven carpets. At one of the town's oldest shops, an artists' co-op known as **FRACOP**, huge carpets hang from the walls and are piled in stacks at the store's rear. The most authentic patterns feature vivid designs inspired by Moorish tiles; slip into the tiny side room to glimpse a craftswoman in action.

THE GREAT WHITE WAY Backtrack to Évora, then cruise 21 miles northeast into Redondo, where master potters turn out colorful earthenware. Continue across the Serra d'Ossa hills and past the marble quarries that flank the town of Vila Viçosa. Called "white gold" by locals, the marble here also comes in cream, black, and



GUESTER STAND/LAIF/REXUS (ÉVORA); INTERNATIONAL MAPPING



Monsaraz, a Knights Templar village, overlooks the Guadiana Valley bordering Spain (above). Artisan rugs are ubiquitous in Arraiolos (left).



pink—particularly prized—and has cast a long spell of prosperity on the city. Wander the historic town through the orange-tree-studded **Plaza da República** to the grandiose **Ducal Palace**, built in 1501 and remodeled over the next two centuries. Just about every surface in Vila Viçosa glistens with marble, from streetside benches to the doorsteps of the humblest of abodes. Housed in a 110-year-old train station adorned with azulejo tiles, the **Marble Museum** tells the stone's history.

GETTING MEDIEVAL On a quick drive 12 miles south, you might spot shepherds tending their flocks on your way to

Terena, a hilltop hamlet where a medieval castle stands guard. It's worth staying over at the atmospheric **Casa de Terena**, a 17th-century bishop's house turned inn. The sustainably minded proprietors rely on local sources for food, including lamb from a nearby shepherd, and help guests take advantage of the region's natural beauty by arranging countryside bike rides and bird-watching outings (look for endangered black storks, eagle owls, and red kites).

Moving south, cruise past vineyards as the road climbs toward a medieval scene: the wall-encircled village of Monsaraz lofted like an eagle's treetop nest. Walk up the formidable ramparts to the castle keep that presides over the **Alqueva**, the largest of several artificial lakes in this hot, dry region. Ply its tranquil waters on the *Sem-Fim*, a 50-foot-long Dutch cargo vessel retrofitted as a sailboat that's docked three miles away near Telheiro.

Consider lingering at **Monte Saraz**, an 18th-century olive plantation offering stylish suites; its outdoor swimming pool was once an olive oil repository.

sampled at a center called **CEPAAL**, where neat cabinets showcase a wide variety of the liquid gold. Mourão also sustains what's said to be southern Portugal's best-preserved Moorish quarter. Find alleyways hemmed in by low-slung, white-washed dwellings; one now houses the **Museu Árabe**, with a 14th-century well.

Drive another ten miles or so farther south to the farming village of Pias. Order the local favorite, *pata negra* (black pork), at **Restaurante O Adro**. In a 300-year-old building, the family-owned **Bética Hotel Rural** exudes authenticity, its guest rooms splashed with Alentejo accents such as dried sunflowers and wicker headboards that mimic grains of wheat.

The compact, walled town of Serpa, lauded for its eponymous sheep's milk cheeses, is a dozen or so miles farther. Amble along slim lanes to Rua de Nossa Senhora, where **José Carrasco Abraços Bule** sells and doles out cheese samples (try his creamy, 40-day-old *queijo amanteigado*).

Make time for the brick-floored **Museu do Relógio**, with a collection of 1,800 timepieces, such as a 1791 Girard-Perregaux pocket watch, and a room dedicated to the Portuguese clock. It's an apt place to reflect on the unofficial motto of the Alentejo—"where even time takes its time." ■

SNIFFING THE CORK

Can't see the trees for the forest? Stay at a working cork farm

The Montados, Portugal's indigenous cork forests, make up the world's largest such landscape, and the highest concentration clusters here in the semiarid Alentejo. Like the region's stoic natives, cork oak is curiously hardy. The tree regenerates its own bark, which is cultivated for its rare qualities—lightweight, resilient, waterproof,

tasteless, odorless. Used as a bottle stopper as early as the fourth century B.C. to plug Italian casks, cork really hit its exporting stride in the 18th century, when Iberian Peninsula farmers began producing cork stoppers in earnest.

Cork's eco cred runs deep: A cork oak must be at least 20 years old before the bark can be harvested (and then only once

every decade or so). Cork woodlands also provide safe haven for endangered and migratory birds such as capped herons, nightingales, and short-toed eagles.



Harvesting cork

In the Alentejo, you can still observe cork harvesting done by hand from late May through mid-August by staying at a working cork farm, such as **Herdade das Barradas da Serra**, an hour south of Lisbon in Grândola, or **Herdade da Maroteira**, near Redondo. On farm tours, learn about forest maintenance and watch for wildlife such as grouse and foxes. Over at Évora's **Mont' Sobro**, cork souvenirs vary wildly—from jewelry to ice buckets. —J.B.

PORT OF CALL

Going Natural in Cabo, Mexico

Five authentic, off-the-boat excursions | *By* **RAPHAEL KADUSHIN**

Until recently Cabo San Lucas, sitting at the southern tip of Mexico's Baja peninsula, got by on its party-town, sand-and-cerveza reputation. But now, fresh restaurants revive the local cuisine, rediscovered galleries showcase Baja crafts, and eco-expeditions celebrate the area's natural beauty. Most cruise ships sailing the Mexican Riviera stop here, anchoring at sea and tendering passengers into port. Among the town's top lures:

Swim With Sharks

2.5-8 HOURS

Cabo has always been famous for its sport-fishing. But if you'd rather commune more peaceably with the resident wildlife, **Cabo Expeditions'** sustainably minded trips feature seasonal whale watching (December to April; 2.5 hours, \$85); swimming with docile whale sharks (8 hours, \$175); and zero-gravity trekking in the Sea of Cortez (3.5 hours, \$75).

Eye Glass Artists

1.5 HOURS

Artisans show off the traditional art of glass-blowing at the **Cabo San Lucas Glass Factory**. Some of the artists will even let you blow a

few glass bubbles yourself. Then browse the on-site shop stocked with pitchers, plates, tequila glasses, and signature cactus-shaped drinking glasses.

From Mole to Mangos

2.5 HOURS

Decorated with murals of old Cabo, **Mi Casa** serves Mexican favorites such as a 35-ingredient mole as well as typical Baja dishes like *almejas rellenas* (stuffed queen clams cooked in a fire pit) and *sopa fresca* (homemade flour pasta with dried chile paste and olives). **Hacienda Cocina y Cantina** turns locally grown produce into dishes like the crab flautas topped by a zesty mango Baja slaw.



Grab a Pew

1 HOUR

Anyone needing a moment of tranquility—no matter what your denomination—should duck into the **Iglesia de San Lucas**. Spanish missionaries completed the stone church in 1730. The interior is so hushed you can hear the ceiling fans whir.

Hump Day

5 HOURS

See Cabo from a different perspective with a four-hour **Cabo Adventures** safari (\$99). It starts with a tour of the Baja desert outback, builds to a camel ride along the beachfront, and caps off with a toast of local tequila.



Water worlds: At Land's End a favorite photo op is El Arco rock formation; non-divers can explore underwater with Cabo Expeditions' Snuba adventure (top).

KAREN DOODY/SNUBA INTERNATIONAL, INC. (SWIMMER); HP HUBER/HUBER/SIME (ROCKS)



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ADVENTURE

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Upon observing wave-riding Hawaiians in 1907, Jack London rhapsodized that surfing was "a royal sport for the natural kings of the earth." These days, teens to CEOs connect with the elemental thrill of the surf, and devotees of the sport have set up surf schools and camps around the globe for would-be beach royalty.

KAUAI, HAWAII > Startling beauty, a low-key vibe, and brawny offshore waves have long delighted serious surfers at Hanalei Bay (Laird Hamilton calls it his home break). But the bay's crescent also welcomes newbies with clean swells, a sandy bottom, and warm water; nearby, humpback whales can sometimes be seen spouting. **Surf n Sol's** multiday programs include private or small-group lessons, beachside digs, yoga, and massages.

NICOYA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA > Miles-long beaches draw tourists to Playa Tamarindo, but thick jungle and unpaved roads keep most travelers from venturing south of the beach town. **Surf Diva's** resort, set near a traditional Tico village, features a stretch of sand so secluded its location is kept secret from enrollees before they arrive. The camp is for women only; boards are scaled for their narrower shoulders and shorter reach.

MONTAUK, N.Y. > The shore break at Long Island's Ditch Plains can be challenging—it's choppy, cold (lower 70s° F at the highest), and edges a mostly rocky beach. But warm, enthusiastic **Corey's Wave** instructors, including many who've been surfing here their entire lives, reveal how to navigate the rocks and where to find beer and burgers onshore.

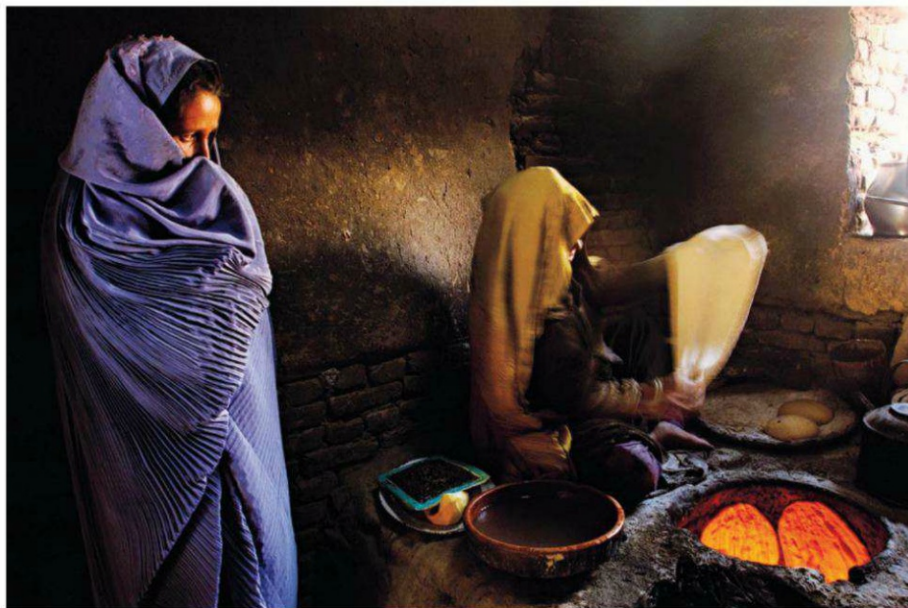
SANTA CRUZ, CALIF. > For those who crave hands-on help, **Richard Schmidt Surf School** delivers. The onetime pro surfer paddles alongside beginners, lifting them into the pop-up and adjusting their stance for smooth, long rides. At Cowell's Point break, where Schmidt runs classes and camps, a single wave can roll for a quarter mile.

BYRON BAY, AUSTRALIA > Wave chasers mingle with New Age crystal healers and astrologers at beaches along the coast's easterly apex. The surf haven is also the longtime home of 1965 U.S. surfing champion **Rusty Miller**; now nearly 70, he teaches private, early morning lessons at Byron's gentlest shore breaks. For Miller, surfing is a near-spiritual pursuit; he encourages ocean respect and humility.



Surf's up: Richard Schmidt Surf School guarantees novices "uprightness on the first go-out."

RICHARD SCHMIDT SURF SCHOOL



Behind the veil: Women make naan in a Kabul home.

EXPERIENCE

Kitchen Confidential

It's a wonderful homemade Afghan meal, full of conversation and conviviality. But where is the cook? | **By PAUL KVINTA**

I CAN'T SEE the woman's face, but it's not because she wears a burka, as many women in Kabul do. It's because she won't open the front door more than two inches. She stares at me from behind a chain lock and mumbles into a cell phone. After what seems an eternity, she hangs up and says something in Dari to my driver, who is standing next to me.

"Faheem is stuck in traffic," he tells me. "He will be here in 30 minutes. She says you can go inside and wait."

Faheem Dashty is a well-known Kabul newspaper editor, and he has invited me to his apartment for dinner. It's 2007 and there is plenty to discuss, what with reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan going poorly and word of a possible Taliban offensive planned for after the snows melt.

His wife opens the door all the way and motions for me to enter. She wears a blue head covering and a half smile. She is young and pretty. I remove my shoes, as is the custom, and she shows me silently to a room off the main hall. Then she leaves, closing the door behind her.

I never see her again.

There is no furniture in the room, just a traditional Afghan carpet and a television set with three children flopped before it playing video games. They glance at me

with indifference and continue playing. I seat myself on the carpet. After a few minutes I hear the woman's voice from the other room, and the oldest of the children, a boy of about eight, puts down his video controller and leaves the room. When he returns he's carrying a tray with a pot of steaming green tea and a porcelain cup and saucer. He pours me a cup, then resumes playing his video game. Almost immediately, his mother calls him again. This time he returns to me with a bowl of pistachios. He tries reaching for the controller again, but his mother's firm voice intervenes once more. He brings me a bowl of dates, then one of pine nuts, then the teapot again. For the rest of the evening he remains on point and vigilant. My teacup is never empty.

As I nosh on these snacks and wait for his father, I contemplate this exceedingly gracious and generous hospitality, which I experience everywhere in Afghanistan. Providing guests with your very best is a celebrated value in the culture. No one knows this more than the woman behind that door, even though she is circumscribed from hosting me herself. So she does so through her child, anticipating my every need.

Dashty arrives, greets me warmly,

and hugs his children. The young ones scamper off, but the eight year old keeps hustling. As his father and I fall into deep discussion, the boy unfolds a *dastarkhan*, the traditional dining cloth, on the carpet before us. He then presents us with a copper basin and pot, pouring water over our hands and offering us soap and a towel.

Soon, various food-laden dishes appear: first, oval-shaped pieces of warm naan bread topped with sesame seeds, followed by dolmas, grape leaves stuffed with rice, mincemeat, and spices. Then comes *palao*, a pilaf with raisins, carrots, and nuts; and *qorma*, a lamb stew with onions and cilantro. We eat, per tradition, with our right hands, using the naan to scoop up each item. The food just keeps coming: yogurt, oranges, pomegranates, honey-sweet baklava. Not only does the final result approach gustatory nirvana—the savory contrasting exquisitely with the sweet, the spices dancing lightly across my tongue—but the *dastarkhan* on which the plates are set suggests a richly colored work of art.

For two hours Dashty regales me with stories, about how he lost an eye during the post-Soviet mujahideen wars, about how he was in the same room with Ahmad Shah Massoud when al Qaeda suicide bombers assassinated the legendary Northern Alliance leader. But as compelling as all of this is, my thoughts meander repeatedly to the woman in the next room.

I imagine her furiously slicing, dicing, boiling, and frying in a kitchen that is no doubt sweltering. Does she even like to cook, I wonder? Does she have any hobbies? Does she share her husband's political views—and voice them?

It's late when Dashty finally walks me to the door. I put on my shoes and thank him for the wonderful meal and engaging conversation. It's his pleasure, he assures me, and he promises we'll talk again.

As I head into the frosty winter evening, my stomach feels warm, full and satisfied. As for Dashty's wife, the fabulous cook, I never even learned her name. ■



A cook shapes dough in a kitchen in Kabul.

RISE AND SHINE DETROIT

Hard times aren't over, but there's no denying

The vaulted artistry of the Guardian Building impresses doorman Christopher Roddy—and is just one of the reasons Detroit is looking up.



NE

OIT

ing the Motor City's new spirit

by **ANDREW NELSON**
photographs by **MELISSA FARLOW**

It's

Rome. We are in a hurry to get somewhere, and Detroit is, too. Even a little boy in the mid-1960s notices the tempo. The Motor City is in motion. We build America's cars. Thanks to Berry Gordy's Motown, the world hums our songs. The city, fifth largest in the U.S. by population, is at the top of its game.

Today, Michigan Central Station still looks Roman, but it's a Roman ruin. Closed since 1988 and stripped of valuables by vandals, or "scrappers," the empty hulk symbolizes my old hometown's decline, buckling beneath crime, corruption, and events such as the 1967 riots, the 1970s gas shortages, and the rise of Asian auto imports. My family, like others, moved away. A city of almost two million residents in 1950 shrank to 713,777 in 2010.

To visitors, Detroit's attractions verged on the desperate: Three new casinos corralled gamblers inside windowless rooms; a desultory monorail circled downtown. The city's collapse actually created a new business in "ruin porn," as locals escorted tourists eager to experience the postapocalyptic atmosphere of decaying factories and abandoned offices.

But Detroit has been down so long, any change would be up. And "up" is why I've returned. Something's happening in Michigan's southeast corner. Call it a rising, a revival, a new dawn—there's undeniable energy emanating from Detroit. America noticed it first at the 2011 Super Bowl. Chrysler debuted a TV commercial with rapper Eminem, star of the film *8 Mile* (named after the road that serves as Detroit's northern border). The ad crystallized the city's spiky, muscular pride and won an Emmy, but Detroit was the real winner.

"This is the Motor City," Eminem declared, "and this is what we do." And, increasingly, Detroiters are *doing*: working-class Latinos in Southwest, recent college grads in Midtown and New Center, and African-American professionals in Boston Edison are improving their neighborhoods. An expanding Detroit RiverWalk edges downtown, where corporations like DTE Energy, Quicken Loans, and Blue Cross Blue Shield have moved in thousands of workers.

not called a "tug" of memory for nothing: I'm outside Detroit's railroad station, and I instantly recall my mother's gloved hand pulling mine as we rushed through the vast atrium that was inspired by the imperial baths of ancient

A favorite 1960s-era restaurant, the London Chop House, has announced its reopening. And that badge of gentrification, Whole Foods, plans to build a store in the inner city.

Even outsiders have started arriving, drawn by a sense of adventure. A new resident had told me: "If you visit Detroit, you're an explorer. Be prepared for a rich, very soulful experience."

A flashing red light jolts me back to the train station's razor wire and rubble. A fire engine pulls up alongside me.

"Anything wrong, officer?" I ask, nervously. Maybe they think I'm a scrapper.

"Naaah," says Ladder 28's Capt. Robert Distelrath, with the backslapping, broad *a*'s of the Midwest. "Just checking things out. What are you doing?"

I tell him I'm here because I hear Detroit is coming back.

Distelrath grins. "There's more to us than this train station. Go to Slows Bar BQ," he says, pointing into Corktown, the neighborhood bordering the station. "The owner, Phillip Cooley, he's at the center of a lot of things. He's trying to bring Detroit back all by himself."

It's only 11 a.m., but Slows is full up for lunch. Customers crowd tables made of reclaimed timber. Waitresses serve sandwiches, the bun tops tilted backward to accommodate the pile of brisket heaped under them. Pints of beer and platters of waffle fries slathered in melted cheddar follow. No shy portions here.

"Detroiters don't like fancy-pants food," a local tells me. True that. It's a town where you can still score a plate of eggs and hash browns for \$2.50 (at Duly's Place, a 24-hour diner on West Vernor), and where restaurants selling Coney Island hot dogs—invented in Michigan, despite the name—inspire intense loyalty.

When completed in 1913, Detroit's 16-story train station (*opposite, top*) loomed over a city on its way up. Now an empty husk, the landmark has become a highlight of "ruin porn" tours. But creative changes are under way here and elsewhere in the city: A new Reflection Garden fills the station's forecourt with feather reed grass, an artist paints a mural on the Matrix Theater in Mexicantown (*bottom left*), and chalkboard doodles decorate Astro Coffee in Corktown (*bottom right*). A gilt figure on the Fisher Building (*bottom middle*) holds up a still potent symbol of Detroit's influence.



Cooley isn't around, but I can't resist ordering a pulled pork. Afterward, I continue my search for the urban pioneer. I eventually find him down the street at a just opened coffeehouse called Astro.

Cooley, 33, is an unlikely city savior. The Michigan native and former Louis Vuitton model traded Milan's fashion runways for Detroit's pockmarked sidewalks to start a new life. He and his family opened Slows six years ago.

"We've got lots going on," he admits. He's lent his expertise to Astro and to Sugar House, a craft cocktail bar next door. He's

we enter the holy building. It's quiet. Services aren't being held. We head back downtown via busy Warren Avenue.

"It's like a mini Beirut," Saad says as we pass an Arab coffee roastery that fills the air with the smell of toasted beans. "And a mix of everything," she adds, as I point to a sign touting the "Best Halal Pizza in Town!"

We stop at her favorite bakery, Shatila's, where the counters groan with abundant varieties of baklava and honeyed dates and other sweets from Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, and where the attendants chat sociably with the customers. Though many women wear head scarves and the conversation is often in Arabic, it's as much Middle America as Middle East.

In fact, non-English migrants enjoy a long tradition here. Travelers often forget that Detroit was born as French as New Orleans. Founded in 1701 by Antoine Laumet de La Mothe Cadillac, Detroit shows its Gallic roots in street names such as Livernois, Cadieux, and Gratiot.

I visit another religious spot—the redbrick Ste. Anne de Détroit church, founded by Cadillac's settlers and the second oldest continuously operating Roman Catholic parish in the United States. The church and its exterior plaza exude an Old World charm that mixes with the growl of the semis rumbling over the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor, Canada.

Such contrasts make up the Detroit *terroir*, the French concept for the characteristics of a region that impart a distinct flavor. Detroit is a welter of opposites—like Slows's old-school smoked barbecue dished out in a hip setting. I visit Midtown, site

of many of Detroit's cultural gems, to tour the Detroit Institute of Arts. The DIA is a classical, white-frosted cake of a building that harbors Diego Rivera's dynamic, colorful murals of the auto assembly lines. The murals were commissioned by Edsel Ford in 1932. Ford may have been a wealthy industrialist, but he hired a Mexican Communist to paint his workers.

While some of the city's buildings are scruffy, others are gleaming again, especially the pre-war skyscrapers. Detroit's art deco towers make those in Miami's South Beach look like anthills.

To get a feel for them, I take a tour with architectural historian Dan Austin. "Detroit has one of the largest collections of Roaring '20s architecture anywhere in the country," Austin says. "You'll find them downtown, in the neighborhoods, in the suburbs." He ticks off a series of greatest hits: "Fox Theatre, the Fisher Building, the Penobscot. And it's not just art deco buildings, either—a town house development, Lafayette Park, is the largest collection of mid-century modernist Mies Van Der Rohe residences in the world."

Austin is explaining this as we approach the 40-story Guardian Building. Built in a damn-the-expenses manner, this 1929 tower is machine-age bravado in stainless steel, marble, and nearly two million tangerine-colored bricks. "I like to call it 'holy cow' architecture," says Austin, as we push through the heavy glass doors and enter the lobby. "You see it and say—"



A pair of sisters fit in with the polka-dot motif of an outdoor art project started in 1986 on Heidelberg Street. The view from the Detroit RiverWalk (opposite, top) takes in a boater and the skyline of Windsor, Canada. "Stop! In the Name of Love" topped music charts in 1965 and continues to inspire fans to bust out their best Supremes moves in the Motown studio (bottom) where the song was recorded.

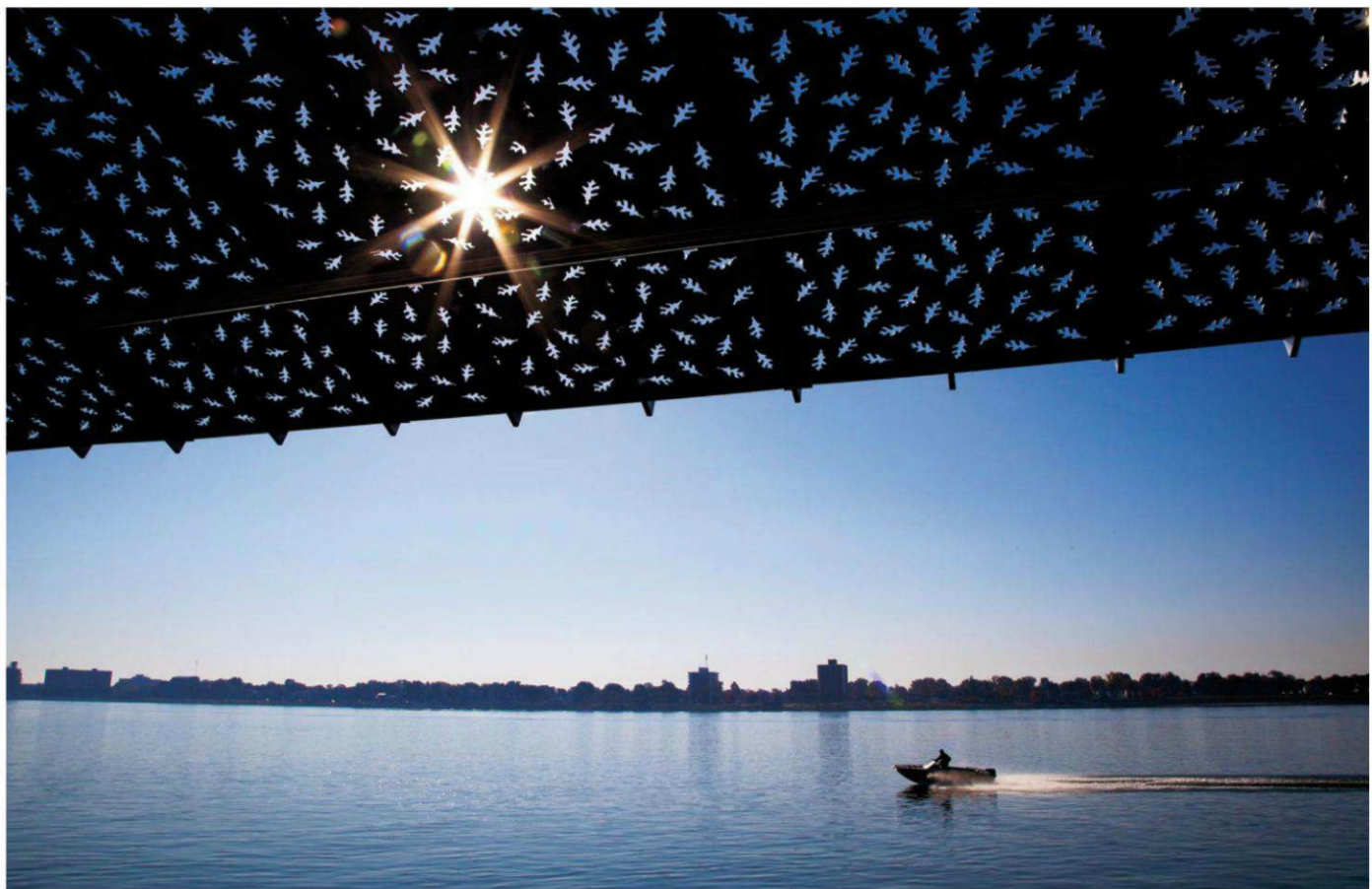
even helped finance and build a community parking lot.

Each new attraction becomes another beam for shoring up Corktown, a neighborhood of sagging factories, revitalized gingerbread Victorians painted in bright colors, and empty lots transformed into vegetable gardens.

"We're a scoot-up-to-the-bar-we'll-make-room sort of place. Everyone's welcome," Cooley tells me as we finish up our americanos. He's talking about Slows, but he could be describing the city. "Detroit's authentic," he says. "It is a very unique city."

I DISCOVER THE TRUTH OF COOLEY'S STATEMENT the next day, visiting Dearborn, the suburb that's home to both automaker Ford's world headquarters as well as a burgeoning Arab-American community. After touring the Arab American National Museum with my guide, Fay Saad, a native Michigander of Lebanese descent, I'm welcomed at Habib, a lavishly furnished Middle Eastern restaurant that does a brisk business in wedding, graduation, and birthday banquets.

"Our families are just like everyone else's," Saad says in the same hearty Midwest accent as fire captain Distelrath's. She invites me to accompany her to Dearborn's Islamic Center of America, the largest mosque in North America. She dons a head scarf as







Members of the Riverfront Canine Club pause along the Dequindre Cut, an old railroad track turned greenway trail dotted with a temporary installation of art reproductions from the Detroit Institute of Arts.



A group tours Mexican artist Diego Rivera's "Detroit Industry" murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The fresco cycle was commissioned by Edsel Ford and depicts autoworkers in heroic mode. Intrepidity also extends to the city's dining scene. Torya Blanchard (opposite), owner of creperie Good Girls Go To Paris, says, "Detroit's low start-up costs and innovative restaurateurs make it the perfect storm for good food."

"Jesus!" I gawk at the vaulted space rising five stories above the 60-foot-long lobby. This interior would not be out of place in Oz. The ceiling is finished in an Aztec-inspired design of Technicolor tile hexagons. The walls and floors are clad in rare Numidian and travertine marbles. A decorative metal grill with a Tiffany glass clock in its center separates the lobby from the onetime banking hall. I make a feeble attempt to capture the dazzling beauty on my iPhone's camera. But not even Apple's ingenuity can do this place justice.

remarks. Hard to believe nightlife in this town was once so moribund visitors would drive to Grosse Pointe, a plaid-and-preppy suburb, for fun.

I end up at Café d'Mongo's Speakeasy with McCallum and an ever-growing crowd of hipsters, artists, and night crawlers. The bartenders serve up ribs and cocktails that mix Captain Morgan rum with Faygo, a local soda pop that Detroiters seem to guzzle with everything.

It's the far side of midnight. Maybe it's the rock-and-roll shaking

Other architectural beauties are getting makeovers as well. Double-Tree by Hilton has reopened the Fort Shelby hotel. The revamped, 34-story Broderick will rent apartments to downtown office workers.

"It's an art to update an old building yet stay true to the spirit of the original," says Bradley McCallum, who helps manage the Westin Book Cadillac, one of Detroit's premier hotels, which reopened in 2008 following a \$200 million renovation.

McCallum and I are dining later in the day at Roast, chef Michael Symon's restaurant in the Book Cadillac. I'm working on a Rock City burger, topped with bleu cheese, caramelized onions, and the restaurant's signature savory "zipp" sauce, and keeping tabs on the hive of activity. An elegant couple, the woman in silvery lamé, swan past us to their table in the buzzing main room. Outside, on Washington Boulevard, a Hollywood film crew is shooting a scene. Klieg lights dazzle like diamonds. "I think New York has a bit of a crush on Detroit," McCallum

MADE IN DETROIT

Booms and busts mark the history of this uniquely American city BY KAREN CARMICHAEL

1760 The British capture the fort during the French and Indian War.



1894 The Detroit Tigers are founded as a minor league baseball team.

1926 The city's land area expands to its present dimensions of about 139 square miles, larger than current-day Boston, San Francisco, and Manhattan combined; the Red Wings hockey team is founded and goes on to win the Stanley Cup 11 times to date.

1940-1945 Detroit's automotive factories convert to churning out tanks, trucks, bombers, and other military equipment during World War II. The work accounts for about 20 percent of the country's war production.

1701 French soldier/explorer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac builds a fort and fur-trading post that he names Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit.



1866 Local pharmacist James Vernor invents Vernor's ginger ale, one of the earliest American soft drinks. It predates Coca-Cola by 20 years.

1908 Henry Ford produces the first Model T, which remains the country's most popular car for nearly two decades. He invents the assembly line in 1914 for swifter production.



1932 The Great Depression cuts auto production to just over a million, down from a peak of more than five million in 1929. Only the largest car companies, including the Big Three (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler), survive the decade.



1959 Songwriter and music producer Berry Gordy founds Motown Records, whose artists dominate American popular music in the 1960s along with the Beatles. Gordy signs acts such as the Supremes, the most successful female singing group in history.



1967 Five days of rioting sparked by a police raid on an unlicensed bar leave 43 dead and thousands of buildings destroyed. Detroiters and "Queen of Soul" Aretha Franklin records the Grammy winning hit "Respect."

1987 *RoboCop*, set in a dystopian, crime-ridden Detroit, is released. The critically acclaimed film is nominated for two Academy Awards.



2008 The U.S. government loans billions of dollars to General Motors and Chrysler. Of the Big Three, only Ford avoids temporary bankruptcy.

1950

2000

1950 Detroit's population reaches its height at 1.85 million, making it the fifth largest city in the nation.



1964 Ford introduces the iconic Mustang and sells over a million units within its first two years of production. It becomes one of the most noteworthy launches in automotive history.

1973 Coleman Young is elected Detroit's first African-American mayor; the Renaissance Center (above, right), now headquarters for General Motors, is built in 1977 in an attempt to revive the city's riverfront.

2000 Comerica Park, the new home of the Tigers, opens as part of the revitalization of downtown. Neighboring Ford Field opens for the Lions football team two years later.





the speakers, or maybe it's the Faygo cocktail. I'm tired. I say my goodbyes and head for bed. I have a big day tomorrow. I am going to circumnavigate an emerald.

The jewel is Belle Isle, Detroit's grandest, greenest park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, who also designed New York's Central Park. I'm exploring Belle Isle's 5.5-mile ring road by bike, an easy choice given the city's flapjack-flat topography and the creative tours by Wheelhouse, a start-up bike shop located on the city's new RiverWalk. Co-owner Kelli Kavanaugh rattles off the list of guided rides: "We do automotive heritage, haunted Detroit, architecture tours—did you know we were a huge station on the Underground Railroad? We'll take you to historic districts like Indian Village on the east side. Detroit's got great things, and it has problems. We show you both."

I set off with 15 people around the 982-acre island, pedaling a tough single-speed Kona. Set in the middle of the Detroit River and connected to the city by a single bridge, Belle Isle looks a bit scrubby. Tour guide Pat Ahrens talks frankly about the park's lack of money but also tells about the groups working to solve that. We glide past steamship enthusiasts coming to the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, South Asians playing cricket, and picnickers grilling their burgers to hip-hop. The island's charms—a botanical garden and conservatory, an art deco marble lighthouse, the prestigious Detroit Yacht Club, and the stunning views of Canada and downtown—explain the draw.

Returning to RiverWalk, we take the Dequindre Cut Greenway, a 1.35-mile-long below-grade railroad track the city has turned into a bike path stretching from the river almost to Eastern Market. I make a note to myself to visit the market later, on a Saturday.

I was just a kid when I last saw Eastern Market, but it's very much alive—thriving, in fact. But it's no temple to precious foodstuffs; it's a working produce and meat showroom, supporting 250 independent merchants and vendors whose offerings attract 40,000 shoppers every Saturday morning (and Tuesdays in the summer and fall).

It's already crowded when I arrive at 9 a.m. The smells of melon and cider hang in the air as I weave my way past forklifts trundling bags of onions. Chalk-lettered signs tout smoked lake trout and white perch, Red Haven peaches, green wax beans, and sweet corn. As I walk past Dave Wilson, the hirsute flower seller in stall 468, he calls out in a voice so clear it cuts through the hubbub: "Good morning! Good morning! Oh yeeeeeaaah!"

Wilson sounds like a herald for a new city. Detroit's problems are still big ones. I heard plenty about corruption and red tape, but it's the context of the complaining that's important. People are trying to get things accomplished, rebuilt, reborn.

In Detroit it seems natural I fall into conversation about these things with a friendly stranger in the market parking lot. Thomas Page, 62, is a retired Los Angeles cop wearing a T-shirt that says, "Detroit: The Fun Side of 8 Mile."



Loyal Detroit Tigers baseball fans gather at the \$300 million Comerica Park before a game. A block away from the stadium, the Opera House (opposite, top) provides a lavish home for the Michigan Opera Theatre company. A patch of hope amid urban decay, James Riley's vegetable garden (bottom) in the Brush Park Historic District flourishes in a lot where a Victorian mansion once stood.

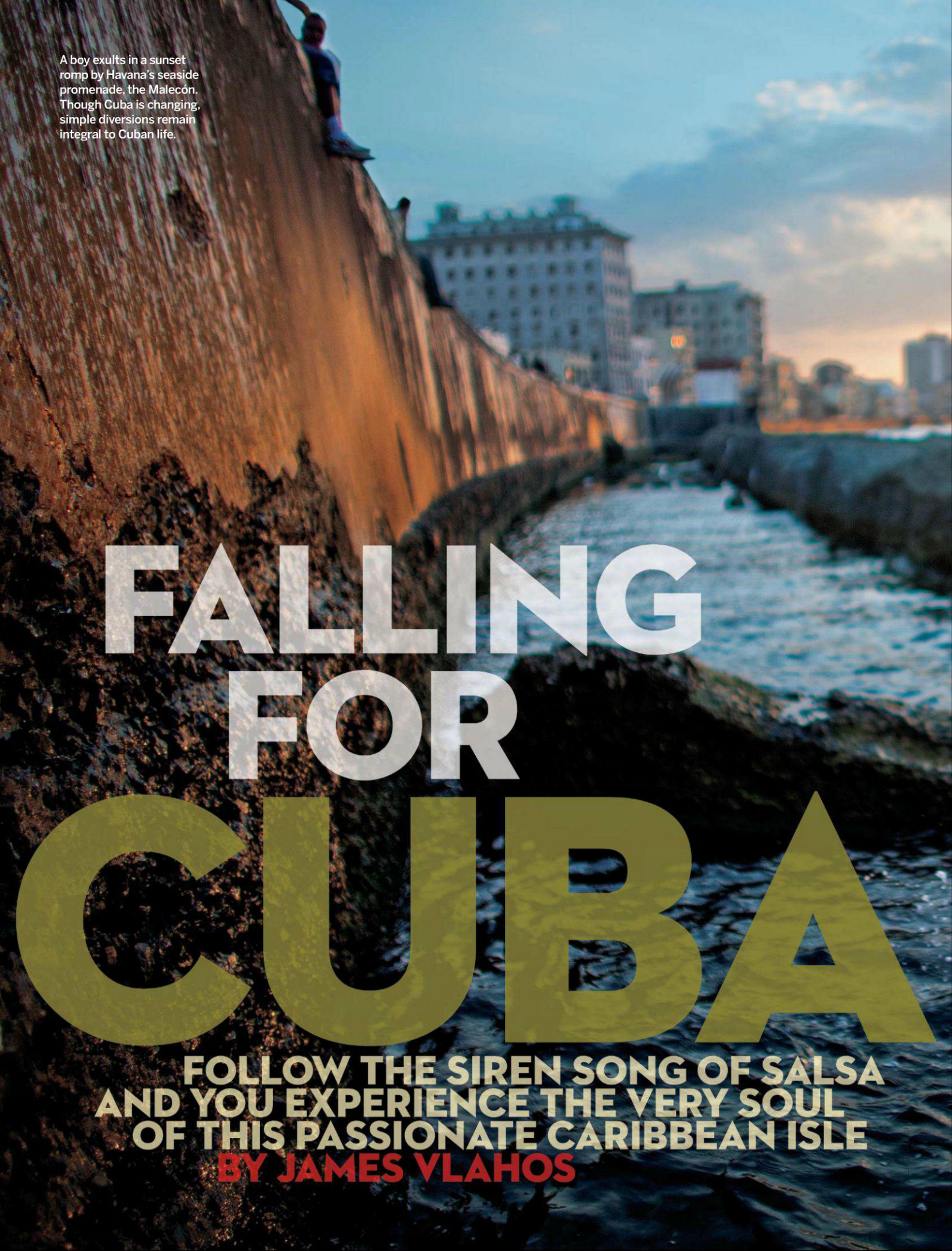


Born and raised here, he left southern California to move home. After my discoveries, I'm not surprised when he tells me he hasn't looked back.

"Detroit's never going to have the weather," he admits. "But in the last six months I've seen more change than what's taken place in the last five years. We're revving our engines. Detroit's moving again."

"Good morning!" I hear the flower seller, his voice rising above the din. "Oh yeeeeeaaah!"

New Orleans-based writer ANDREW NELSON and photographer MELISSA FARLOW last teamed up for the feature "Tweet Me in Miami" in the April 2010 issue.

A photograph of a boy sitting on a high, weathered concrete wall in Havana, Cuba. The wall runs along the ocean, and the city skyline is visible in the background under a sunset sky. The boy is silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun.

A boy exults in a sunset romp by Havana's seaside promenade, the Malecón. Though Cuba is changing, simple diversions remain integral to Cuban life.

FALLING FOR CUBA

**FOLLOW THE SIREN SONG OF SALSA
AND YOU EXPERIENCE THE VERY SOUL
OF THIS PASSIONATE CARIBBEAN ISLE**
BY JAMES VLAHOS



TWO DANCERS WHIRL

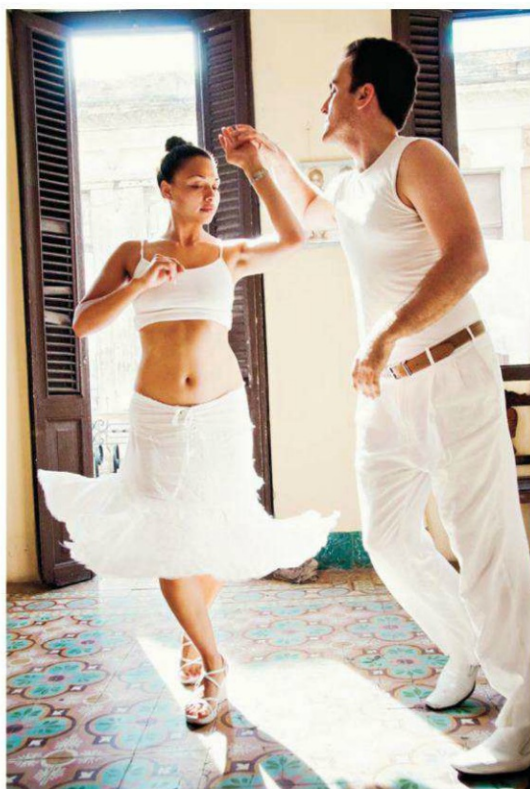
onto the dance floor, materializing as if from the smoke of a genie's lamp. The man whips through a triple turn, then drops to his knees. His partner's skirt spins into a blur as her legs slice the air. ¶ Behind them, a seven-piece salsa band blazes away. The keyboardist unspools a melodic loop; the conga player fires off a drumroll. Parked in the audience at Café Taberna, a nightclub in Havana, Cuba, I'm bursting with the urge to jump up and dance. ¶ The trumpet player spears a final high note. The dancers twirl to a stop, acknowledge the applause, then slip off. After a few minutes I approach. "Where did you learn to dance like that?"

"At the Tropicana," Asmara Núñez says, naming the legendary Havana nightclub where she honed her skills. Yoel Letan Peña shrugs and points to his upturned wrist. "*Sangre*," he says. Dancing is in his blood.

Salsa is in my blood, too, though I have no known ancestors from south of the 35th parallel. I first experienced salsa's electrifying charge in my 20s when I was a waiter at a Caribbean nightclub, and have dabbled with the dance ever since, taking lessons and hitting clubs. Salsa dancing makes me happier than almost anything else, so it followed that I should do it more, do it better—and do it in a place where the dance really comes alive.

Everything I had heard pointed to Cuba, where many of the music's key stylistic ingredients developed in the first half of the 20th century, but the island's frosty political relations with the United States had made a visit virtually impossible. Recently, though, relations between the U.S. and Cuba have been warming up—and Cuba's experiments with socioeconomic reforms have arguably changed it more in the past few years than in decades. The time had arrived. This was my chance not only to take the next step in a love affair with salsa but to experience a nation that Americans alternately romanticize and vilify, but rarely get to appreciate up close.

The plan: My wife, Anne, and I would follow the music, take dance lessons, and hit the best clubs in the colonial cities of Havana, Cienfuegos, and Trinidad. Salsa, to be sure, is one facet of this complex land. But the music—intense, sorrowful, celebratory, laced with complex improvisations—is an ideal vehicle for helping



newcomers begin to understand Cuba.

At Café Taberna, the band launches into its final set. Before I can say anything, Asmara Núñez pulls me onto the dance floor, where we're joined by Yoel Letan and Anne. I listen for the intermittent pulse of the bass, felt more than heard beneath the blasting horns and clattering drums. The rhythm works its way up from my feet, loosening my hips, then my arms. I sweep Asmara past me, twirl her twice, then spin myself as the intoxicating grip of the music takes hold.

HORSE HOOVES clatter on cobblestones. A carriage veers to the curb. The driver draws the reins to his chest, and a well-dressed man and woman dismount. Smiling, they set off down an alley, into the velvety stillness of Habana Vieja—Old Havana—at night.

"They look like they know where they're going," Anne says. "Let's follow them." We enter the alley, threading between facades of colonial palaces—a legacy Cuba's Communist rulers have

downplayed. Havana has thousands of historically significant buildings, but only a hundred or so have been restored under a multimillion-dollar, public-private campaign. What we wander past are crumbling relics. Laughter reverberates from behind a splintered wooden door. A woman peers down from a wrought-iron balcony clinging to a pocked stone wall. Then the alley ends, and we emerge, astonished, onto a plaza filled with people: diners sitting at outdoor tables, laughing and talking; waiters ferrying trays of grilled pork and frosty glasses of *mojitos*, the island's signature mix of white rum, mint, sugar, and lime. At the north end



Cuba's capitol, seat of the nation's congress until the 1959 revolution, rises next to Havana's spired Grand Theater, home to Cuba's National Ballet. Balletic spins (*opposite*) fire up a salsa dance in Havana.



of the plaza, under the bell towers of a Gothic church, a salsa band plays away on a red-carpeted stage. Spotlights glint off trumpet bells. Hands blur over conga drums. On the stage beside the band two dancers twirl expertly. I turn to Anne. “Let’s get a table.”

Stumbling upon great live music, as we’ve done tonight at Plaza de la Catedral, is common in Cuba. With average monthly salaries of \$20, few Cubans tote iPods. Instead, they produce their own daily sound track, with gusto. On the first hour of our first morning in Havana, we’d come across a *trovador*, or folksinger, strumming his guitar on a patio, and two trombonists exchanging snippets of song on a sidewalk. None of them were performing for an audience or putting out a tip jar. They seemed to be celebrating what it feels like to wake up on a sunny morning on a tropical island.

Cuban salsa sways with joy. It also burns with passion—an overheated music for an overheated island, from the sparkling white-sand beaches of Varadero to the monumental limestone bluffs of Viñales, from *guajiros* (farmers) crossing tobacco fields on horseback to Cubans who, in the absence of new construction, often live ten to a room behind those glorious colonial facades.

Passion certainly explodes from bands like Habana Soul. Though it’s not yet noon, Habana Soul’s players attack the first set of the day at a café with the frenzied glee of a 2 a.m. encore. The singer’s ponytail whips around as he spits out the lyrics, then jump-kicks to punctuate the melody. Bobbing my head, I’m charged with electricity too. One of the percussionists notices and steps out from his drums. Pushing my espresso aside, he hands me a pair of sticks called *claves* and gives me a quick lesson on the rhythm of *son*, a

stylistic precursor to salsa. Soon I’m playing along with the band. *Click-click. Click-click-click.*

Havana, and Cuba, have calmer energies too. Late in the afternoon, Anne and I stroll with other couples along the Malecón, Havana’s seafront boulevard—mansions to our left, Caribbean Sea to our right. As the sun drops, the light becomes rose-colored, as if filtered through cotton candy. Fishermen cast lines. Lovers sit atop the seawall. Children play chicken with the waves breaking below.

The following day we explore Calle Mercaderes, one of countless stone lanes crisscrossing Old Havana. Past tree-shaded Plaza de Armas—one of the island’s first public squares—we come to a three-story mansion. I peer through the front door; a structure this stately must be a museum or hotel. Instead I glimpse a room crowded with furniture, people, and laundry. Frank Alpízar, a tour guide, later tells us it’s common to find such incongruities behind the majestic facades of Havana’s buildings—a set of apartments like this one, a supper club, a food cooperative, a sculptor’s studio.

To be Cuban, you could argue, is to be expert at living among incongruities. Cubans still line up for subsidized food rations, yet everyone has basic health care. The majority of citizens haven’t been allowed to buy real estate or cars, yet the mansions lining the Malecón, their paint peeling and timbers rotting, would be worth millions of dollars apiece almost anywhere else if renovated.

STEP FORWARD, THEN BACK. Left foot, right foot, left; right foot, left foot, right. Quick-quick-slow is the rhythm, and you don’t want to rush. *¡Más despacio, por favor!* Rushing is ruinous.



Symbol of a bygone era, a reconditioned 1951 Chevy ferries beachgoers to Playa Ancón, “one of the best beaches on Cuba’s south coast,” says author James Vlahos. Havana’s luminously restored Plaza Vieja (opposite) dates to the 1500s and displays architectural styles from baroque to art nouveau.

**SOME CONSIDER TRINIDAD, A PLACE OF
PALM-FRONDED SQUARES AND WHITE
CHURCH STEEPLES OVERLOOKING THE
GLITTERING CARIBBEAN, THE PRETTIEST
SMALL COLONIAL TOWN IN CUBA.**

Queen of Cuba's hill towns, 500-year-old Trinidad harks back to quieter island times. Together with the nearby Valley of the Sugar Mills, it was declared a World Heritage site in 1988.





Yoel Letan, the dancer from Café Taberna, stands inches from my right ear. It's eleven in the morning and we're squeezed into the loft above Café Taberna. No air-conditioning, mind-fogging heat. "1-2-3, 1-2-3," he counts, the words sounding like a mantra—one I'm currently violating, apparently, though I'm not sure how. I learned the basic steps years ago, so my feet are moving the way they should. The problem is how I'm moving. "*Suave, suave*," Yoel says. Soft, soft. "Loosen up, my North American friend." I try to move more smoothly. Yoel grabs my shoulders again and gives them a little massage. "*Suavemente*," he commands.

Anne is getting her own lesson from Asmara, and though neither of us is earning a gold star from the teachers, we feel lucky they agreed to instruct us. Havana is stuffed with brilliant salsa dancers, but they generally don't have websites that allow arranging lessons from abroad; the handful of dance studios I found online were not so slyly marketing themselves to middle-aged women hoping to star in their own private versions of *Dirty Dancing*.

Ten minutes of instruction pass before I satisfy Yoel. He then pairs me with Asmara while he salsas with Anne. Singing his own danceable sound track, he teaches us the *dile que no*—"tell him no"—a passing move in which leader and partner swap places, followed by a succession of turns. The final move has us spin each other, our combined arms whirling like eggbeaters overhead, a move so complicated that I can pull it off only when I don't think about what I'm doing. We finish the dance, and Yoel finally gives an encouraging little nod. "*Impresivo*," he says.

"ARE YOU A MUSICIAN?" asks Lili Robinson. "My son is too! I'm so glad to meet you." Petite and energetic, Robinson runs the

casa particular—B&B—where we're staying in Cienfuegos, a city on the south coast. She plops our bags in our bedroom. "Okay," she says conspiratorially. "What are we going to do?"

I say I want to visit the village where Benny Moré, one of Cuba's most famous singers, was born in 1919. Robinson dismisses the idea. "There's nothing to see there," she says. Then her eyes light up. She grabs my arm. Why waste time looking at the dusty relics of a long-dead singer, she asks, when I could hang out with a real Cuban musician today? "You have to meet my son," she says.

Robinson scoots me out the front door. A few blocks away she pulls me over to a statue of Benny Moré and takes my picture. Minutes later we duck into an apartment where Lili's son, Rajadel, has been rehearsing with his band. A guitarist, Rajadel looks like a Cuban version of the actor Jack Black. When I ask about Cuban music, he mentions *danzón*, a 19th-century folk music and dance that influenced salsa, then beats out drumming patterns on his thighs from religious Santería rituals introduced to Cuba by African slaves, explaining how they were incorporated into Cuban son. "We like to mix in rock and hip-hop and make it sound more modern. The style is called *timba*."

Life in Cuba is a tug of war between modern and traditional, the pace of change slowed to a crawl by communist ideology and economic reality. The bus ride from Havana to Cienfuegos had taken Anne and me past abandoned farmlands with no signs of commerce. Billboards, lonely and few, depicted Cuba's revered triumvirate of freedom fighters—José Martí, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro—accompanied by slogans like "*¡Viva la revolución!*" Traffic was almost nonexistent. I felt as if I were heading out on a road trip in the summer of 1959.

Taking it to the street, musicians perform for passersby in Trinidad. "I came upon outstanding music by no-name players everywhere in Cuba," says author Vlahos.



Cuba has changed since its 1959 communist revolution, of course, but in a city like Cienfuegos, which I wander around after visiting Rajadel, the evolution isn't always obvious. Unlike the island's other colonial towns, which feature heavy baroque Spanish-colonial architecture, the buildings in Cienfuegos—which was settled by French immigrants in the early 1800s—are airy and refined. I stroll past colonnaded mansions painted in pastels and reach the tranquil, crescent-shaped shore of Cienfuegos Bay. I now understand why singer Benny Moré proclaimed Cienfuegos “*la ciudad que más me gusta a mí*”—the city I like the most.

A day later and 50 miles east, I'm riding a horse in what some consider the prettiest small colonial town in Cuba, Trinidad, a place of palm-fronded squares and high, white church steeples bunched on a hillside overlooking the glittering Caribbean Sea. My riding guide, Julio Muñoz, wearing jeans and a cowboy hat, trots ahead on a cobblestone lane between colorfully painted residences. Salsa music blasts from a home on the town's outskirts, reminding me that improvisation is what people need in Cuba, especially if they want to be entrepreneurs. Muñoz has done everything from engineering to wedding photography. He currently runs Casa Colonial Muñoz, a guesthouse in Trinidad, and recently started a horseback guiding business, for which he is wrangler, stableboy, and vet.

We follow a dirt road into farmland, then branch off onto a trail climbing a canyon into the Escambray Mountains. As the hilltops around us go golden with the setting sun, Muñoz talks politics. He tells me that, much as musicians like Rajadel are tweaking the conventions of salsa, Cuba's current president, Raúl Castro, is experimenting with free-market reforms. The state is the largest employer in Cuba, but weeks before we'd arrived, the government announced plans to expand private employment. Muñoz could for the first time legally hire an employee to help him and his wife run their guesthouse; he could expand this new enterprise of guiding people on horseback.

“The greatest resource of Cuba is its people,” he says after we dismount and take a swim beneath a waterfall. “They just need the freedom to do what they want and realize their potential.”

SMOKE. SWEAT. Pink and green strobe lights slashing through fog-machine mist. Crushed between gyrating bodies, I'm trying to squeeze forward to a stage strung with sequined curtains. I smell spilled rum and feel hot skin. Club music pounds my chest like a mallet. On center stage, three women emerge from swirling white clouds, dancing in unison in wickedly short skirts.

Havana has many venues for listening politely to Cuban classics. Casa de la Música, the site of a final-night blowout for Anne and me, isn't one of them. You come here to hear Cuba's top salsa bands play loud music into the night. You come to dance, after many drinks, with a partner or a stranger. What we crave tonight is music that reflects modern Cuban life, passionate, colorful, sexy.

The dancers finish their number. A master of ceremonies steps forward with a microphone and announces the headlining act as if it were a goal in World Cup soccer. “*Charangaaa Habaneraaaa!*” An army of musicians—singers, trumpeters, keyboard players, and more percussionists than I can count—pours onto the stage. All are dressed in white. And all, as soon as the first song kicks off, begin stepping side to side in a choreographed routine.

Sabor, the trait aficionados say defines great salsa, translates literally as “flavor,” or “spice.” The true definition is elusive, something felt rather than understood. I'm certainly feeling it tonight. Talking, drinking—suddenly none of these activities interest me. I want to try my new dance skills, now. With Anne's blessing, I invite a Cuban woman to join me. She says her name and I say mine,

OFF TO CUBA? WHAT TO KNOW

GETTING THERE

Current U.S. regulations allow Americans to travel to Cuba legally on chartered, people-to-people tours with outfitters licensed by the U.S. government. These include Friendly Planet Travel, Insight Cuba, and National Geographic Expeditions.

ENTRY DOCUMENTS

American visitors need a valid passport. Licensed outfitters provide the required paperwork, including a letter authorizing travel under their license.

WHAT TO EXPECT

People-to-people tours emphasize local cultural experiences. Participants will meet Cubans from all walks of life and take part in typical Cuban activities, including salsa dancing.

WHEN TO GO

Dry, warm weather is most likely December through April. Other months tend to be humid, rainy, and subject to hurricanes.

MONEY

U.S. dollars and U.S. bank-issued credit cards and traveler's checks aren't accepted in Cuba. Dollars are exchangeable for Cuban convertible pesos in Cuba—but are the only currency subject to a commission of up to 12 percent.

SHOPPING

The U.S. government allows visitors returning from Cuba to bring back “information,” such as books, music CDs, some original works of art, and photos. Rum, cigars, and other souvenirs are not currently allowed into the U.S. —Meg Weaver



but we can't really hear each other over the pulsing sound system. I take her hand and we weave our way out to the dance floor.

Earlier in the day, Anne and I had taken another dance lesson, from a hectoring perfectionist named Grey Jorrín. “No,” she said, when I stepped forward to initiate a turn rather than stepping back to give room for Anne to spin in front of me. “No, no, no.” Now, even under the frontal musical assault of Charanga Habanera, Jorrín's lecturing voice plays in my head. I take my partner's right hand with my left and put my arm around the small of her back. I count carefully, remembering my lessons, and sweep her past me with a dile que no. “You dance salsa!” she exclaims.

A new song begins in the thumping, modern timba style. Trumpets sear my ears and conga drums reverberate in my gut. The air thickens with heat as bodies press in from all sides. Soon, I am no longer thinking. I'm just dancing, turning, as much a part of the music as the players on the stage. This, without a doubt, is *sabor*. It feels like a spray of lighter fluid on the fires of my soul.

California-based JAMES VLAHOS last wrote about night hiking in Yosemite in “Star Trek: Yosemite to the Moon” (July-August 2011).



A WORLD OF WONDER

Here are three destinations that will add sparkle to a child's life—and yours **By KEITH BELLOWS**

A large school of black-striped salemas swimming in clear blue water. The fish are densely packed, creating a textured, shimmering effect. The water is a deep blue, and the fish have dark bodies with lighter stripes.

**SPECIAL
FAMILY
TRAVEL
SECTION**

ER

A sea lion spirals into a school of black-striped salemas, just one of the natural wonders that will excite kids who visit the Galápagos Islands.

I

WAS CONCEIVED in the late 1940s at a lodge near the crest of Victoria Falls (*below*). My parents were living in Leopoldville, Belgian Congo, where I'd spend my first four years (a memory: the baby elephant we kept in our yard). In 1954, concerned about impending riots that would forever transform what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we left Leopoldville for Canada. You could say those early years in a distant land—and that adventurous flight—confirmed me as a traveler at a young age. This is the first of an annual feature dedicated to family travel—and a sneak peek at *100 Places That Can Change Your Child's Life*, a book I'm writing for next year. Our kind of family travel does not constellate around kids' clubs and amusement parks; it focuses on real travel that can change how children (and their elders) see the world and includes trips led by grandparents and others who have a child in their lives. Kids who learn to travel will travel to learn—passports are becoming the new diploma. It's not just the places you visit, but how you experience them that matters.



Africa's thundering Victoria Falls, Earth's largest cascade offers kids the ultimate surround-sound experience.

DARWIN'S UNIQUE WORKSHOP

In the Galápagos, kids get to experience firsthand the spectacle of evolution

There is a misconception among some parents that a holiday to the Galápagos Islands isn't for kids because they won't remember a thing. "Not so," says Francesco Galli Zugaro, who has run cruises in the islands. "The Galápagos experience leaves a lasting impression that can shape the way children understand the world they live in."

That's because this archipelago of 19 islands 600 miles off the west coast of Ecuador is a veritable petri dish of evolution. There may be no more wondrous place on Earth for families to explore together. Kids come face to face with creatures in the wild, feeding a sense of discovery that soon has them walking miles over baking lava for the chance to come across a gnarly-looking iguana or a scuttling Sally Lightfoot crab.

A great way to experience multiple aspects of this national park and World Heritage site is by leapfrogging among the islands aboard an elegant 48-passenger boat. "Each island has different characteristics," says Galli Zugaro. "Some are made of dark volcanic rock, while others have white sand beaches typical of coral islands." These differing environments, as Charles Darwin pointed out, helped foster the evolution of distinct species and subspecies of animals and plants. When our vessel drifts past Fernandina Island in an eerie fog, I spot huge green turtles eyeing us. Sea lions bray like sheep; one lifts three flippers in greeting. "Thermoregulation in action," observes expedition guide Klaus Fielsch. "She's doing that to warm up." Flightless cormorants found nowhere else on the globe cluster onshore. Galápagos penguins—the only species of wild penguin to live north of the Equator—hunker down on a rock shrouded in wisps of fog.

KEITH BELLOWS is the editor in chief of *Traveler*.



Vividly colored Sally Lightfoot crabs claw along a rock in the Galápagos.

DAVID FLEETHAM/GETTY IMAGES (OPENING PAGES); LOUISE GIBB/SABA/CORBIS (WATERFALL); REINER HARSCHE/ANF/REDUX (CRABS)



A tour boat cruises past arid Bartolomé Island, known for its many volcanic formations—especially the distinctive blade-shaped Pinnacle Rock.

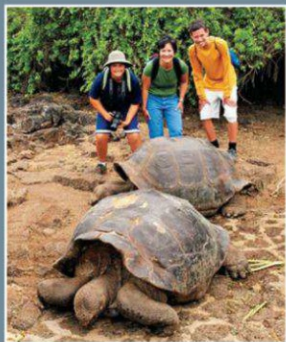
The boat anchors just off the island, and a cross-generational group of us enters the shockingly cold water of the Pacific Ocean. Fielsch explains to us that cold water often abounds with nutrients, which in turn attracts marine life. Within minutes we find ourselves floating amid an armada of sea turtles jawing great chunks of seaweed. One turtle flippers by me with a cloud of blue fish swarming its back. “They’re cleaning,” says Fielsch. I float above another turtle for long minutes, drifting with it on the current. We break the surface in unison, and I look it in the eye. It blinks. One, two sea lions join us, and we have a bobbing tête-à-tête. Then the sea lions and I plunge down into the ocean. I arch, tumble, and flip to keep up with the marine mammals as they flit through the water; they’ve clearly come to frolic. They torpedo, barrel-roll, tickle my face with their whiskers. One playfully gooses me. When

I wheel about, it spins a loop-de-loop with what looks like a grin.

Black-winged male frigate birds greet us on Genovesa Island, their red throats inflated like beach balls. Cries rattle the air as come-hither females wheel overhead looking for potential mates. Everywhere I look, red-footed boobies perch like lawn ornaments. Carpets of black, gargoyle-faced marine iguanas are molting in the searing sun, higgledy-piggledy, atop each other. We trek across dried lava ledges and up high cliffs. Below us, menacing Galápagos sharks—six-footers all—hunt sea lions. And I recall something Galli Zugaro said: “Consider what these creatures had to endure to reach these remote islands and then establish themselves. Iguanas had to survive an ocean trip on driftwood, then survive through adaptation on this arid terrain. It’s mesmerizing.”

As we approach some swamps on rugged Bartolomé Island, Fielsch points out a cluster of tiny penguins. “Where else but the Galápagos would you find penguins—which otherwise live in the Antarctic—hanging around a mangrove swamp?” he asks. On land, we hike through a debris-scape of volcanic pipes, ropy lava, and collapsed volcanic vents. Ascending to successive lookouts, we take in views of a sunken caldera and islands extending to the horizon. A huge basalt tower rears offshore.

Approaching Santa Cruz Island, I spot a tortoise the size of a dishwasher and an only-in-the-Galápagos yellow land iguana with the smile of an eager sales clerk. I walk carefully to avoid stepping on sea turtle



Nature's Playhouse

Families with kids ages seven and under best experience the Galápagos by staying in a hotel and taking day-trips to view sights such as Galápagos tortoises (*left*). Accommodations range from a luxe safari camp to family-owned lodges and are located on four of the main islands. For children eight and above, tour operator Francesco Galli Zugaro recommends a cruise for the variety of experiences it offers. A number of local tour operators have cruises around the islands aboard a choice of vessels, including yachts and catamarans. Note that the location of the islands out in the Pacific Ocean can mean choppy seas, so consider bringing motion-sickness medication.

BOB KRIST/CORBIS (BARTOLOMÉ ISLAND), NORIE QUINTOS/NGS (TORTOISES)



eggs buried in the sand. Then I see a fight for survival in real time. Three baby turtles emerge from the sand under a merciless sun. The lead turtle scuttles toward the surf; the others follow. Soon, the first seems disoriented. The second stops, goes motionless. The third keeps on, its tiny head bobbing. But it, too, creeps to a halt. You can talk about survival of the fittest, but it's disquieting to see the struggle in action.

On Santiago Island, our group takes an hour-long hike through lava fields and encounters a young seal yelping for its mother. "It's a fur seal," Fielsch specifies. Another pup lies wedged in a crevice, languorously sunning while casting a calm eye at a five-year-old boy hovering over it. The seal, like all native Galápagos creatures, is oblivious to human threats. "We can get so close because they have no reason to be afraid," says Fielsch. "There's no natural predator on land here larger than the hawk."

The Galápagos Islands remain an environmental ground zero. "This archipelago is unique, and important to all of us because what is here is found nowhere else on Earth," explains Galli Zugaro. "Before the 1960s, the Galápagos did not have the environmental protections that they enjoy today. Species introduced by man, like goats and rats, were destroying the natural habitat."

These days the islands are fiercely regulated by the nation they belong to, Ecuador, and a phalanx of international agencies intent on protecting this special place where Darwin's theories are illustrated in the real world—a place where kids can learn how to interact respectfully with animals and observe the positive consequences of caring for the environment.

JULIE KUTZKE (MAIN READING ROOM)

NATIONAL TREASURE

Your kids say libraries are boring? Charge their imaginations with a visit to the wonder-filled Library of Congress

Two people sprint through the grand Reading Room in the Library of Congress and disappear down a stairwell. The FBI, police, and a SWAT team swarm in.

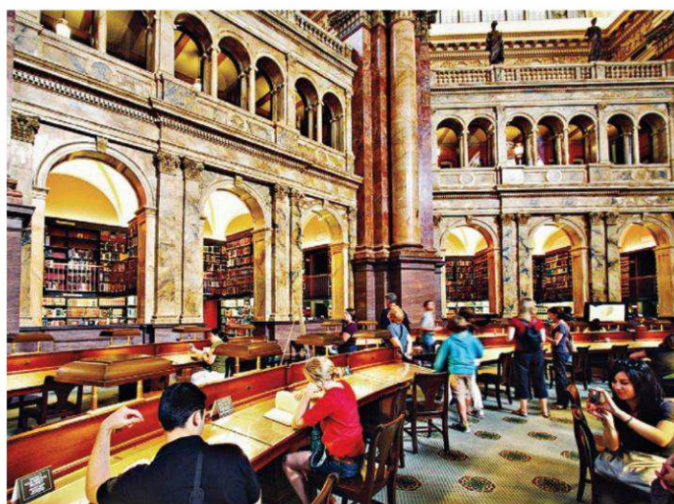
Cut.

This is a scene in *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, the 2007 film sequel to the best seller that follows the adventures of Ben Gates, a history buff on what the film's publicists call a "quest to unearth hidden history and treasures." The Library of Congress plays an essential role in the film—as well it should.

Founded in 1800 in Washington, D.C., and staffed by 3,500, the Library of Congress is the world's biggest library. Its three buildings—named after Presidents Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison—contain 147 million items in some 470 languages on 838 miles of shelves. The Jefferson Building was the Hall of Fame of its time, a crown jewel of America's arts renaissance. Today it houses books, maps, photos, manuscripts, audio and video recordings, digital files, prints and drawings, musical scores, comic books, unpublished works, plays, scripts, films, sheet music, North America's largest rare book collection, and the world's largest collection of legal materials. Up to 10,000 new items are added daily.

Now, unless you have precocious children, the library isn't an obvious destination for kids. "What on Earth could be more boring for a child than a library?" a friend asked me. "Information needs to be experienced, not embalmed."

Exactly—and the Library of Congress of 2012 offers a range of experiences. "Kids get into this place in a visceral way," says Ford Peatross, curator of architecture, design, and engineering collections in the Prints and Photographs division. "It's how you



Visitors explore the opulent Main Reading Room during an open house.

experience a library that makes the difference.”

One great way to entice kids through the imposing front doors: Transform a visit into a treasure hunt and knowledge quest using the library’s many gee-whiz gadgets; few kids can resist the lure of cool technology. Get the ball rolling at the new “Library of Congress Experience,” which deploys interactive kiosks that make unique historical and cultural treasures come alive. Step up to one kiosk and flip the pages of priceless books—from the Gutenberg Bible to George Washington’s annotated copy of the U.S. Constitution—on a touch screen, zooming in for detail and hovering over icons that open notes about the pages. At another kiosk try your hand at deciphering Maya hieroglyphs. Then check out the interactive “Creating the United States” video wall, which reveals bits of history depending on where you stand. The exhibit also allows you to interact with drafts of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights.

Kids will get a kick out of the place in more ways than digital: The library houses its share of quirky material, including Alexander Graham Bell’s first drawing of the telephone; the contents of Lincoln’s pockets the night he was assassinated; the first document to use the word “America” (a 1507 “Map of the World”); a five-second documentation of a man sneezing, made in 1894 and the first film copyrighted in the U.S.; and an original Barbie doll.

Intriguing as this stuff is, it’s mere preamble to the place itself. I’m standing in the Great Hall—the library’s main entrance—in the Jefferson Building with Peatross, whose infectious love for the place is irresistible. “I remember watching two kids, about 13 and



Treasure Hunt

Most of the attractions at the Library of Congress are in the Jefferson Building. Visitors can take guided or self-guided tours of the building and attend gallery talks. The Main Reading Room is open only to researchers, who must be at least 16 years old. A new attraction is geared to kids: the Young Readers Center, with presentations by authors. For more information, visit www.loc.gov.

8, gaze up and gasp,” he says. “One turns to the other and exclaims: ‘Dude, look.’ Pointing to the ceiling, he says, ‘Homer.’ There was the name of the Greek epic poet—which he thought referred to Homer Simpson. They made their own iconography out of it.”

Icons and symbols crowd the Jefferson and Adams buildings, but tucked into murals and carved into statues are details that signify much yet often go unnoticed—an occasion for a treasure hunt. “See that woman?” asks Peatross, pointing to a figure on one of three bronze entrance doors to the Jefferson Building. “She’s Memory, a widow holding the armor of her fallen warrior husband. At her feet is an urn containing his ashes. It’s a vessel for memory—and that’s what this building is.”

“Over there is America,” Peatross continues, “represented by a young, beardless Abraham Lincoln, with an electric generator at his feet. When this building opened, science, especially electricity and the products it spawned, represented how America was changing the world, from Franklin’s discovery of electricity to Morse’s telegraphy and Edison’s lightbulb.”

He points to another statue. “Imagination, with the wings of Genius. Wings are everywhere in this place.” So are flames. “Flames fan the imagination. Kids get that. Hunting for symbols is an adventure that sneaks in

history and culture.” He winks. “It’s great when adults find a symbol. But it’s so much better if kids find one we didn’t.”

Among the more cryptic symbols is one resembling a collapsed beehive. “That’s a liberty cap, the symbol of a freed slave in ancient Greece,” Peatross explains. “In early representations of the French and American revolutions, the figure of Liberty wore such a cap or carried it on a pike. Thomas Crawford designed a cap into the statue of Freedom commissioned in the 1850s for the top of the Capitol. It was rejected because Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, later president of the Confederacy, refused to allow a statue symbolizing a freed slave to ride the U.S. Capitol Building.”

You can easily confirm this piece of history in the heart of the library—the Main Reading Room. “This has always been the most publicly available reading room of any major research library in the world,” says Peatross. “It also is one of the great rooms in Western architecture.” An octagonal structure ringed by eight semicircular windows, it proves to be a chamber of eights. Eight allegorical female statues represent the foundations of civilized thought and life—religion, philosophy, poetry, science, law, commerce, history, art—and eight pairs of statues of illustrious men, including Plato, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Newton, and Beethoven, signify the heights of human achievement. Perhaps the best views of the room are from the second level, which surveys the book-filled floor below and the gilded dome towering 160 feet above.

It’s hard to imagine a child not awestruck by the scale and majesty of the place. “No wonder Hollywood filmed here,” says Peatross. “The Library of Congress offers one of the finest movie sets in America.”



High-tech interactions with centuries past—here the Spanish conquest of Mexico—make history come alive at the library’s “Exploring the Early Americas” exhibit. Symbolic art fills the Great Hall (opposite), including a torch-bearing statue representing electricity.



KYOTO: FLEETING BEAUTY

A landscape in Japan's city of gardens elevates everyday moss to an art form

I still recall my first geisha sighting. I was in Gion, a small district of Kyoto where geisha have lived since the 1600s. It was around 7 p.m., the sun was flirting with the horizon, and I was ambling along the Shirakawa canal, crisscrossing from side to side on an occasional bridge. The lights of bars and teahouses were winking on. I turned a corner, and there, seemingly gliding inches above the pavement like an apparition, propelled by the choppy locomotion of tiny feet, was a female figure clothed in flowing robes splashed with whorls of color. Her face was a solemn mask of white broken only by the scarlet of her lips. Pink and white flowers rained down from her knot of jet-black hair. In an instant, she was gone.

According to Daisuke Utagawa, a celebrated Japanese chef who knows Kyoto intimately, a geisha is an example of *wabi-sabi*, one of those maddeningly elusive concepts that are so common in Asia. *Wabi*, Utagawa tells me, suggests freshness, quietness, and simplicity. *Sabi* describes a beauty that is tarnished by age, reflecting the impermanence of physical things: the weathering of buildings, the crawl of moss on stone, the scarring of old bronze. It's a Zen notion of fleeting, imperfect, accidental beauty. Says Utagawa: "Wabi-sabi is our spirit. It's what we think is beautiful. We are an emotional people; we appreciate nuance. Wabi-sabi is akin to the inherent beauty within. It is something you can't put your finger

on. It opens your senses to every detail, to every glimmer, to every breath of the breeze."

Kyoto is the ideal place to introduce kids to the concept of *wabi-sabi*. "In my experience, kids are much more open to subtlety than we think," says Utagawa. "Suggest the notion of looking beyond the obvious, and they'll get it very quickly. You can almost make a game of it—one that becomes fun for parent and child."

Two and a half hours southwest of Tokyo by bullet train, Kyoto, Japan's eighth largest city, exudes an enigmatic beauty that reflects centuries of cultural fine-tuning. If Tokyo is brute force and power, Kyoto is subtlety and grace. The city sings to the senses. It seeks to fill the eye with beauty, the soul with order. Japan's imperial capital for more than a thousand years, it is filled with temples, shrines, and palaces, 18 of which have been designated World Heritage properties.

Walk the streets of Kyoto's Gion district with your kids and, in time, you'll spot a geisha. But the ultimate experience to share with your children is the Moss Garden at Saihoji Temple, west of Kyoto. Drive along the winding back roads in the foothills of Mount Matsuo, through dense, sun-streaked glades of green and tan bamboo—and you are there. Utagawa calls it one of the greatest gardens in the world. It's presided over by Zen Buddhist monks who, wishing to preserve their treasured ring of peace,

STEFANO AMANTINI/SHINE





Infinite shades of green fill the Moss Garden (above) at Saihoji Temple, a centuries-old Zen Buddhist sanctuary that lies on the outskirts of Kyoto. A pair of geisha in traditional dress (opposite) make their way along stone-paved streets in a preserved area of old Kyoto near Kiyomizu Temple.

require visitors to make a reservation at least a month in advance.

Even with a reservation, “don’t think you can just walk right into the garden,” says Utagawa. “First you have to do some work.” I enter the temple, trade shoes for slippers, and pad into a room crowded with people hunched over small, low desks. I’m handed a piece of paper inscribed with 262 Japanese characters, then seat myself at an empty desk. Arranged on it are sheets of paper, a bamboo brush, a cube of charcoal, and a small box containing a bit of water. I rub the charcoal into the water to generate a rich black ink. Dipping the bamboo brush into the ink, I then trace each of the 262 characters on paper, trying to capture every stroke. The only sounds I hear are the twittering of birds and soft winds blowing through the eaves. At one point the monks break into a chant. As the minutes pass, I’m drawn deeper and deeper into a task that began as a chore. Finally, 30 minutes later, I’m done. I write my name, the date, and a wish on the paper, place it on a shrine, bow—and prepare to enter the garden.

“The exercise,” says Utagawa, “is to put you in a mood to open up to the beauty that is about to surround you. Because you’ve just focused on tiny calligraphic characters, the garden you now enter will look crisper, brighter, more detailed.”

Picture a moss bed that spreads for acres, ribboned by stone paths and shaded by great trees whose trunks reflect patterns of light from the garden’s many streams

and ponds. Thick moss, thin moss, humped moss, feathery moss. Moss clinging to rock. Moss climbing trees. Moss reflected among orange koi swimming in a pond. Moss shimmering with endless currents of shifting greens. Meadows of moss. Mountains of moss. More than 120 species of moss.

Later, I learn that this green haven, tended by white-gloved caretakers who literally sweep the carpet, was planned some 700 years ago as two gardens, one dry and one moist. The moss, however, following true wabi-sabi principles, soon encroached everywhere, creating a sublime and unexpected beauty. You could say that this moss garden is a paradise on Earth.

Is there a lesson here? Yes. Not just for children but for all of us: the idea that seeing, seeing deeply, is the essence of real travel—and of real learning.



Zen and Now

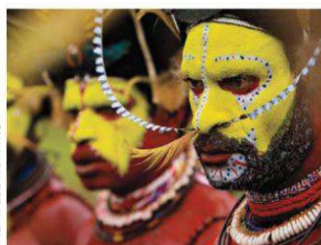
You can visit the Moss Garden only at set times each day, and you must reserve in writing (the priests running the temple wish to keep the solemn, peaceful atmosphere intact). Your request should include your name, address in Japan, occupation, age, number of people in your group, the date you wish to visit (along with alternative dates), and a self-addressed envelope, stamped or with International Reply Coupons for the return postage. Mail it to: Saiho-ji Temple, 56 Kamigaya-cho, Matsuo, Nishikyo-ku, Kyoto. (If you’re already in Japan, you should send a double postcard or *ofuku hagaki*.) Be on time for your visit. The recommended “donation” is 3,000 yen.

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PHOTO SEMINARS / SPRING 2012

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

CATHERINE KARNOW

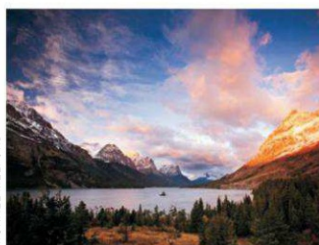


RALPH LEE HOPKINS

Becoming a Versatile Travel Photographer

Great travel photography requires a command of many types of photographs, including landscapes, wildlife, cityscapes, portraits, festivals, and architecture. *National Geographic Traveler* photographers **Ralph Lee Hopkins** and **Jay Dickman** show you how to add dimension and "local color" to your travel photos by incorporating the above elements into your shooting. Also discussed: Tricks for using flash to expand where and when you can shoot and recording audio to produce multi-media slide shows of your work.

Houston: March 4
Los Angeles: March 11
Minneapolis: March 18



MICHAEL MELFORD

Adding the "Wow" Factor to Your Nature & Outdoor Photography

Go off the beaten path with *National Geographic Traveler* photographer **Michael Melford** and noted nature photographer and lecturer **Eddie Soloway** as they reveal techniques to enhance your outdoor and nature photography. View inspired photos and learn methods our experts used to create them. Sharpen your skills to transform your nature photos from so-so to spectacular. Eddie and Michael show you how to capture the spirit of nature whether you're in Big Sur or in your own backyard.

Seattle: March 18
Washington, D.C.: March 25
Denver: April 22



CATHERINE KARNOW

A Passion for Travel: Photos that Tell the Story

National Geographic Traveler photographers **Catherine Karnow** and **Aaron Huey** teach you their secrets for capturing the spirit of a place and bringing back images of enduring significance. Learn how to explore a destination visually, find perfect lighting, and anticipate a great moment. "We'll help you turn your photographs into stories, which will make them much more meaningful," says *National Geographic Traveler* Editor in Chief Keith Bellows.

San Francisco: February 19
Boston: March 11
Philadelphia: March 18



NEVADA WIER

Using Light to Make Powerful Images

Have you ever traveled to a beautiful location you want to photograph only to arrive and find yourself saying, "The light's not right. Now what?" Whether it's a once-in-a-lifetime vacation to a remote destination or an important magazine assignment, you know you have to get the picture. Join *National Geographic Traveler* senior photo editor **Dan Westergren** and world-renowned travel photographer **Nevada Wier** as they explain how to find great light and share their tips for what to do when it's "not quite right."

New York: February 26
San Diego: March 4
Atlanta: April 29

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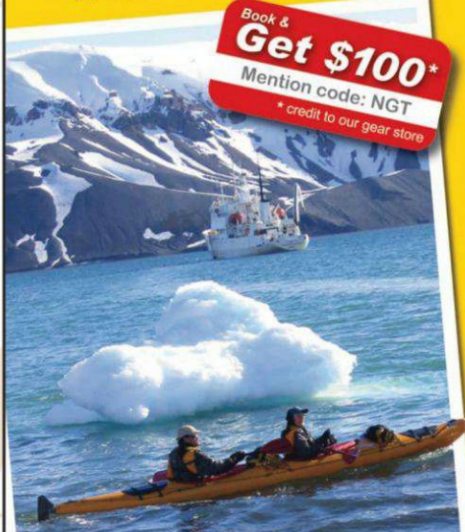
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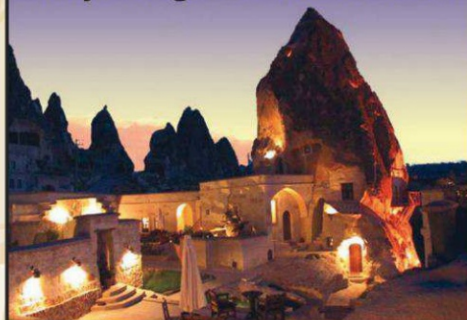
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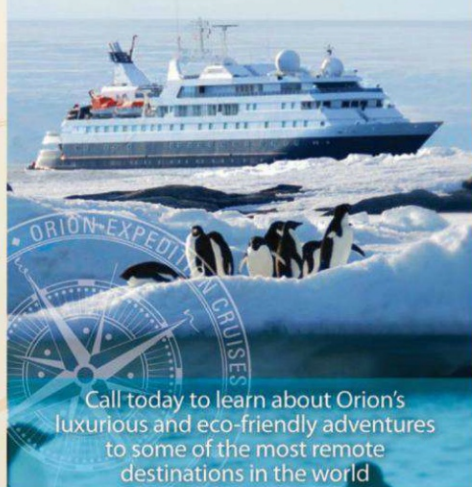
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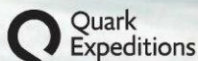
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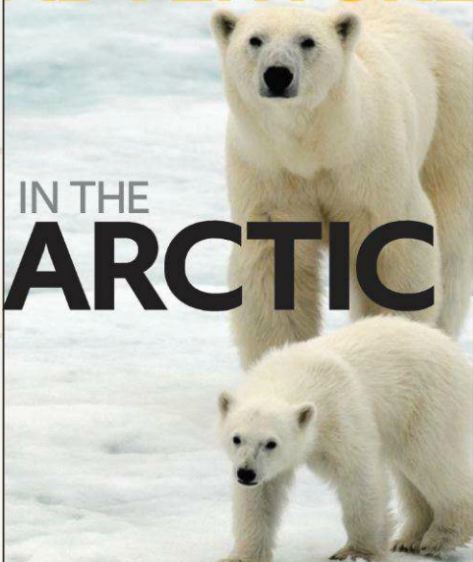
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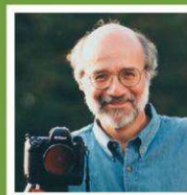
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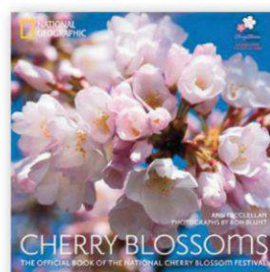
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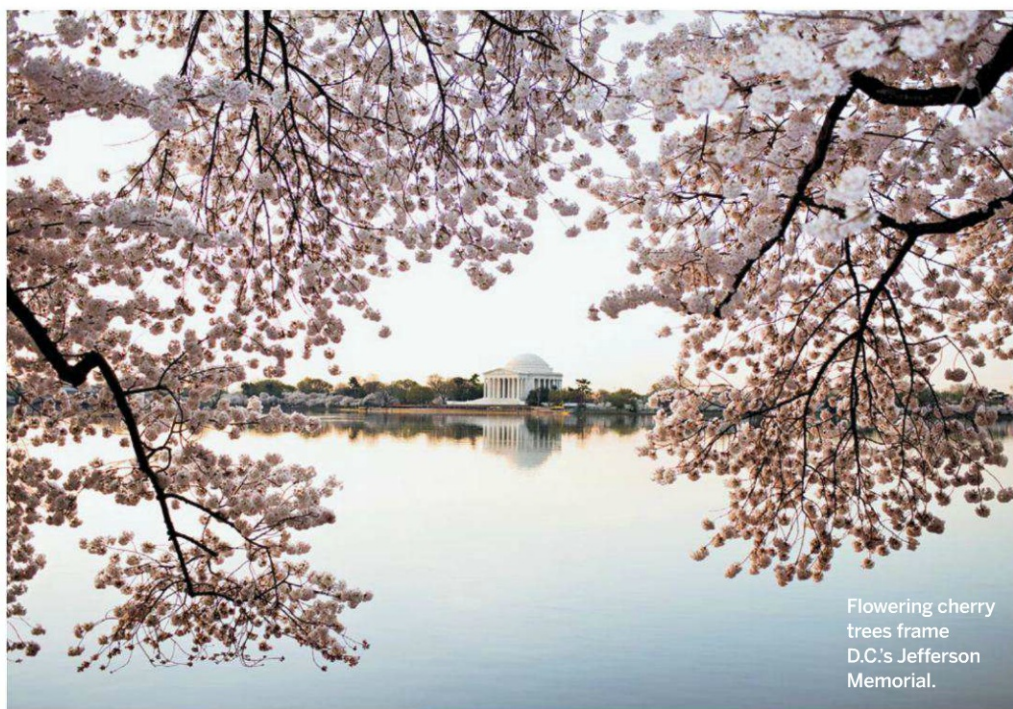


Wellness for Less

During **Wellness Week** (March 19-25), U.S. spas offer discounted treatments. More spring specials refresh mind and spirit: Manhattan's ticketed **Armory Show** (March 8-11) inspires museum deals and open studios around the city, and **National Park Week** (April 21-29) waives admission at some 150 parks.

THE SHORT LIST

[A TRAVELER'S CALENDAR]



Flowering cherry trees frame D.C.'s Jefferson Memorial.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Lesson of the Cherry Blossom

Mar. 20-Apr. 27 For a few days each spring, a haze of pink and white petals softens DC's granite vistas. National Cherry Blossom Festival crowds can thank Eliza Scidmore, the National Geographic Society's first female board member, who dreamed up the idea of importing the flowering cherry trees after an 1885 trip to Japan. On March 27, 1912, the first two of 3,000 trees from Tokyo were planted (find a hundred of those original gifts, now gnarly, along the Tidal Basin's north bank). A century later, Michelle Obama hosts events that include a Japanese street fest and fireworks.

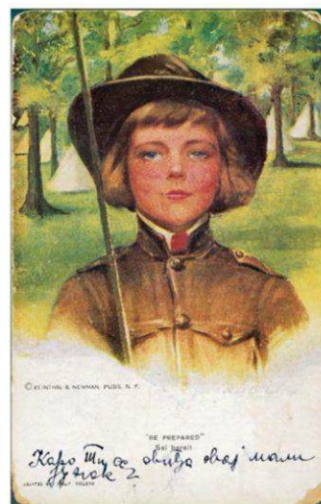


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SAVANNAH, GA.

Year of the Girl

Mar. 10-12 On March 12, 1912, Juliette "Daisy" Gordon Low assembled 18 local gals for the first meeting of what would become the Girl Scouts. Cheer the organization's centennial in downtown Savannah, aka the "Hostess City," on a free tour of Low's 1818 English Regency birthplace. Stop at the museum's shop for silver tea strainers and a reprint of the original handbook.

CONNECTICUT

Sugar Rush

Mar. 17 Early spring at northwestern Connecticut's Sharon Audubon Center means game time for its groves of sugar maples. During MapleFest, tour the working sugarhouse, check out re-creations of early sugaring methods, spy white-breasted nuthatches stealing sips of sap, and learn how to make syrup (and taste the sweet results).



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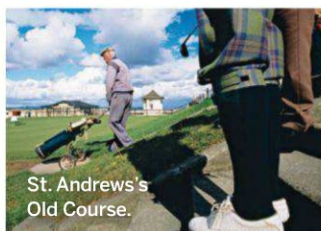
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SCOTLAND

Links to the Past

Mar. 28-Apr. 1 Golfers have been teeing up in coastal St. Andrews since circa 1400; in 1457, Scotland's parliament banned the activity because it was said to distract from archery. The first St. Andrews Golf Festival applauds (ever so politely) the storied sport. Join a guided walk, and toast legends at the Dunvegan Hotel golf pub.

UTAH

New Temple in Town

Mar. 22 Salt Lake City's grid still radiates from Temple Square, but the Mormon-financed City Creek Center intends to resurrect downtown with a shrine to shopping and dining. See fire-shooting fountains, a replica of the snow-fed City Creek streaming through alfresco plazas, and the cast-iron facade of Brigham Young's 1860s "People's Store."

AUSTRALIA

Fair Dinkum Art

Mar. 29 Sydney Harbour gets a Mondrian-style addition with the revamped Museum of Contemporary Art. The \$53 million expansion spotlights Aussie art, from Aboriginal bark paintings to digital works. On the Circular Quay facade, Brook Andrew's sculpture points—it's an LED arrow—to the site's naval history.

TICKET MASTER

Curtain Times

During the World Shakespeare Festival (starts April 23), a slew of commissions premiere, and Shakespeare's Globe in London stages 37 plays in 37 languages. In NYC, Broadway looks inward for the Gershwin-packed *Nice Work If You Can Get It* (opens April 24 at the Imperial Theatre), starring Matthew Broderick.



ICELAND

Horsing Around

Mar. 29-Apr. 1 Reykjavik's newest horse festival showcases the endemic creature when its coat is fuzziest. Its *tölt*, a rare four-beat gait, is said to give riders a sense of floating over the countryside. Catch a kids' *tölt* competition, and tour horse farms.

ENGLAND

Never Let Go

Apr. 10 A century to the day after the *Titanic* left Southampton, the Sea City museum opens. Ascend a gangway-like bridge to remember the historic port's 549 residents (mostly crew members), including Captain Edward Smith, who died in the wreck.



THAILAND

Bucket List

Apr. 13-15 Traditionally, Thailand's lunar new year, Songkran, has been a day reserved for spiritual cleansing, often by gently pouring jasmine-scented water over images of Buddha. These days, the holiday incites exuberant water fights in the streets. In Chiang Mai, no one is immune—young and old, pedestrians and motorcyclists—so arm yourself with a bucket or water gun. (Load up at the moat surrounding the central old city.) Dry off while watching the ceremonial release of birds or fish and admiring sand *chedis* (stupas) in temple courtyards.



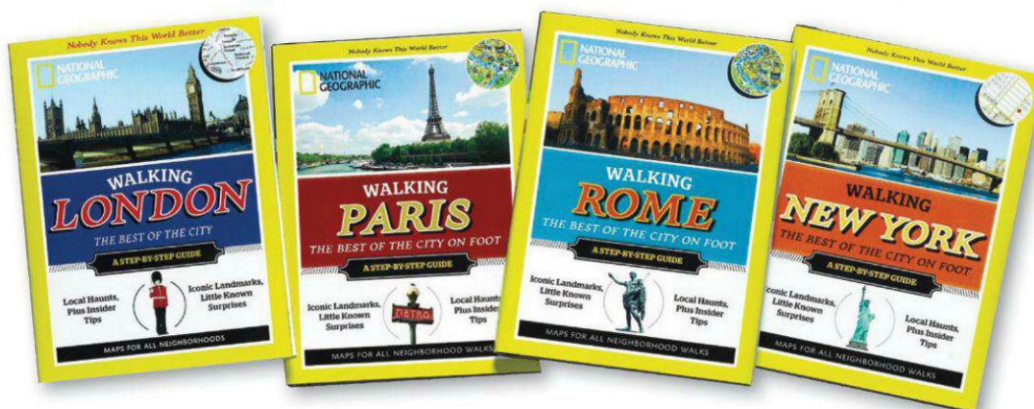
In Hot Pursuit of Spring

Many cultures usher in spring with flair, but some literally involve flares. On Orthodox Easter eve (April 14) in **Vrontados**, Greece, two churches launch thousands of rockets at each other's bell tower. Spring in **Edinburgh**, Scotland, once meant herding pasture-bound animals through "purifying" smoke; the Beltane Fire Festival (April 30) cues fire dancing and a procession on Calton Hill. In **Valencia**, Spain, Las Fallas (March 15-19) fetes St. Joseph with a display of *ninots*, satirical papier-mâché figures. Later, fireworks-stuffed *ninots* are set ablaze.

Reported by Alison Brick, Juliana Gilling, Christopher Klein, Meghan Miner, and Meg Weaver.

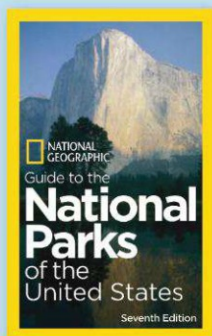


The City in Your Pocket

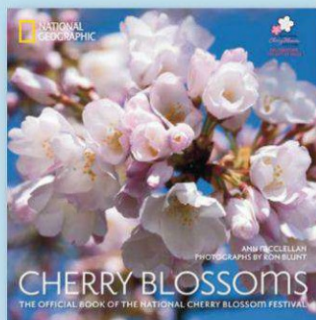


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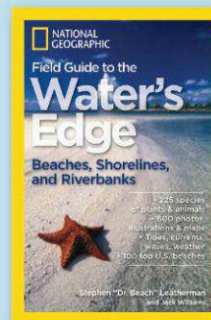
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A Walk in the Clouds

Photograph by **GABRIEL MARIAN**

Suceava County, Romania

IN MAY OF LAST YEAR, I was traveling across the undulating landscape of Suceava County in northern Romania, an area famous for its medieval monasteries covered with vivid frescoes, when a friend and I set out to capture the sunset. This photograph was taken around 8 p.m. from a hill facing Moara Carp, a farming village some thousand feet above sea level. Though this region is actually very close to the town where I live, we arrived at this vantage point by chance—that day was the first time I'd reached those beautiful hills. As the view opened in front of me, I knew I had happened upon the right place at the right moment and immediately started pushing the shutter button. Every time I look at this picture, I discover new details. Far in the background is a swath of Romania's Eastern Carpathians called Obcinele Bucovinei. I call the photo "Patches" and love its meticulous alignment of ground patches juxtaposed against the greatness of the cotton-puff clouds. I've never seen a more perfect meeting between sky and earth.

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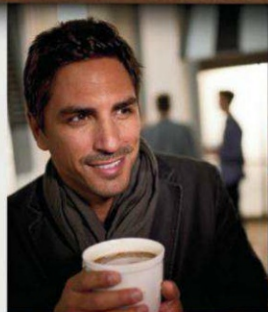
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